

R15p

971

Keppel Jones



Y KEPPEL JONES

GLORIA



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

GLORIA:

A GIRL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN VELD

BY

CHARLOTTE MANSFIELD

AUTHOR OF

“RED PEARLS,” “LOVE AND A WOMAN,” “THE GIRL AND
THE GODS,” “TORN LACE,” “VIA RHODESIA,” ETC.

All Dramatic Rights reserved

LONDON
HOLDEN & HARDINGHAM LTD.
ADELPHI

1916

The characters in this book do not represent individuals, but are merely existing types.

GLORIA

CHAPTER I

MANY have been the arguments as to whether the sunsets the renowned artist Turner painted were ever really seen by human eyes; or if they existed for the greater part in the vision of the idealist, or were the outcome of the imagination of this great genius, but anyone who has watched the sun rise in South Africa, or revelled in its gorgeous passing, will admit that there are beauties which even Turner knew not of.

Sunset on the veld! with the vast open space as an arena in which to stand, and, turning in whichever direction one wills, obtain an uninterrupted view of the Heavens, one seems to see not the mere setting of one sun, but surely the reflected radiance of four; for north, south, east and west, there in every portion of the sky is ever changing colour. Clouds may perhaps collect fragments of the floating gold or waves of the crimson and pass on, leaving the purple and rose curtains to spread themselves across the blue, again to be replaced by amber glories, while afar off the soft pastel shades appear as if the spirits of many opals were abroad, weaving their mysterious lights and revealing, and then withdrawing their secret colours, ever changing, yet more than faint echoes of the deeper jewels flaming in the west.

It was at such a sunset that William Fairbain had gazed as he turned his back to the farmhouse where he and his young wife lived, and he covered his ears

with both hands that he might not hear the cries of the woman in pain; he looked at the Heavens and the beauty gave him peace, the majesty of the supreme loveliness inspired him with hope, he ceased to be a farmer, he thought not of the land or the increase of his cattle, but became just a man, whose mate suffered and whose Creator was revealing to him the power of nature, the poetry of colour.

William Fairbain removed his hands from his ears, he held them out towards the west where the glory of the setting sun was greatest, and he cried aloud:

"Oh God, spare my wife and make my child beautiful."

Then he went indoors and they told him that a child had been born to him.

They called her Gloria.

She had come when the sun set, and as time passed on it seemed that something of the wondrous colouring had been bestowed by right as her dowry. Her hair changed in colour with changing lights, yet always held light, bright brown, gold and russet, coupled with an auburn warmth, such was her rippling hair; her blue grey eyes sometimes danced with mischief, yet sympathy gave them depths of pathos too; while her complexion of cream and roses was something dazzling in its brightness, and quite unlike the usual South African colouring, maybe the English blood of her father gave her the roses, while from her mother (who before her marriage had been known as Aletta Dutoit, and who came from an old French Cape family) Gloria had inherited her love of the land on which she lived.

Twenty years had passed since the coming of Gloria, and no other children had been born to William Fairbain and his wife, excepting one, and he a boy so deformed from birth that almost it seemed as though nature had sent him as a contrast to Gloria; the two children might be said to represent South Africa, the land of surprises and contrasts, of pelting rain and drought, plentiful harvests or utterly destroyed crops, cattle flourishing on little, or killed

by disease while plenty flaunted its stores of good food. Hope and despair, all the plagues of Egypt, yet wealth on and under the land. But it takes sorrow to produce sympathy, and disappointment to promote strength; we rise above the ashes of fallen fortunes if we have souls which will some day fit us to live with the angels.

Gloria loved her little brother Johannes, who was ten years younger than herself, and while she was the constant companion of her father, and helper to her mother, little Johannes, with his crooked back and feeble legs, was the pet of the household, and prized by all as someone very precious indeed, and it always seemed natural that when the farm flourished and extra profits were made, the first thought in each mind should be, "Can anything more be done for Johannes?" and hope for his ultimate recovery was like the South African hope for rain, it grew up periodically, with no foundation for achievement and no prospect of success; yet one always took the sporting chance, if only one had the wherewithall.

The nearest town to Clevedon, the farm the Fairbains owned and lived upon, was Pietsrust, a fair-sized town as South African towns go, situated some thirty miles distant from farm Clevedon, and so named after Piet Hendrik Potgieter, who in 1836 made here his last laager before attacking the Matabele.

Through Pietsrust there ran a river; not the kind of river one so often sees in South Africa which consists of two steep banks, a dry basin, many stones and no water, but a river on which it was possible once a year to hold a regatta, and where many people came for holidays, and boated or bathed and even fished, true, fish was never or rarely caught, but that matters not to a fisherman, and an uneatable geelbeck or a muddy barbel is sufficient prize for a couple of days' angling.

Gloria had seen in the local paper, published twice a week, that a certain doctor of renown from Johannesburg, had come hither to rest, and ignoring the purpose of his visit, she had, unknown to her parents,

written to ask the great man if he would consent to see her brother. Gloria knew that the last crop of mealies had been good, and that the teff grass had done well, she herself had rejoiced at the increase of butter-fat gained through the good condition of the cows, and had risen at five each morning to superintend the separating of the cream and the making of the butter, seen to it that the native farm boys did not smoke in the dairy, and that the udders of the cows were properly washed before being milked. Gloria had worked very hard and helped in so many ways to make the money that now lay in the bank, and of course she knew that to no better purpose could this money be spent than in the helping of little Johannes, so she wrote to the doctor, but said not a word to her parents until she received his letter of consent.

Then with what joy had they talked about this new chance, only little Johannes seemed not very much to care, he had been lame for as long as he could remember, the thought of having to go away from the farm and not seeing his dear Gloria for a week, or perhaps longer, appeared to him a far worse punishment than the prospect of future years of disability, his mother would of course accompany him, and little Johannes looked from the ample form of Mrs. Fairbain, who in the manner of her people, was growing very fat, to the slender figure of Gloria, and said in his quaint way :

“ I think my body is all heart and you have half each, though mother is biggest, I feel so empty when I am away from Gloria.”

And then his father had quickly picked him up and carried him to the Cape cart, which stood ready at the garden gate with four horses inspanned, and Johannes had looked up into his father's face and seen that his father's eyes were moist, and he had whispered hurriedly :

“ You are in my heart too, father, but another heart from mother and Gloria. Perhaps I have two hearts, and one is in the hump on my back ! ” and he had laughed at his little joke, never guessing that his

laughter stung his father as no cruel words could have done.

Then Gloria had jumped up and seized the reins and sat as far to one side as possible so that there should be room for the fat Colonial mother and the thin cripple between them, while Claas, the native farm hand who had been with them many years, sprang up on the seat behind and thought how smart he was in the coat with frayed edges to the sleeves, the wonderful check patterned coat he had bought only a few days before from a boy who worked on the diamond mine some ten miles away.

This diamond mine was called the Vuurklip mine, which means the quartz or firestone mine, and here were situated the nearest Post Office and Police Station, and past this mine Gloria had to drive to reach the town of Pietsrust.

It was a clean sweet morning, such a morning that makes the vast expanse of veld seem not monotonous but alive with interest, redolent with health, the air buoyant in its freshness; not yet was the sun sufficiently hot to scorch with intensity, turning the plain into a desert swept by heat; for the hour was but a little after six, and South African nights and early mornings, unlike Indian, are cool and refreshing.

Gloria, in the habit of Colonial girls, called ever and anon to the horses by name, and lightly flicked with the whip first one and then the other. Neither the Colonial settlers, nor the Dutch in South Africa, ever drive or ride with the same quiet mastership or grace of the English trained horsewoman or horseman, they worry their horses instead of leaving them alone, after first having obtained absolute command over them, in fact a rein in each hand, a pull at the mouth and a shove with the handle of the whip on the hindquarters of the wheelers is the usual mode with which most farmers or their wives drive, and the natives ruin the tempers of any horseflesh left to their care. While as for riding, most women sit on their horses like bags of flour, while the men jog along in what is known as a tripple, their trousered legs hang-

ing straight down in ugly array on either side of the horse, but they get to their destination, and, after all, that is their only object in riding.

Mrs. Fairbain closed her eyes and slept as much as the jolting of the Cape cart would allow, her fat chin seemed able to rest upon her fat chest, for her short neck appeared to be rapidly disappearing, and though in years not much over forty, she had long settled down into the stout contented vrouw of the South African born farmer's wife, who lose their beauty when quite young and never cultivate the grace and deportment which may hide middle age and postpone the so often hideous spectre of old age.

Only when the cart stopped because a gate barred the roadway and the native jumped off the back of the cart to open it, did Mrs. Fairbain open her eyes, and then she would remark on the look of the mealies growing near, or should they have left the mealie fields she would perhaps have an opinion to give on the grazing cattle or wonder when the gate on Potgieter's farm would be mended, or the fence on the land Van Heerden hired be repaired, then she would give a fat sigh and close her eyes again, while little Johannes nestled closely to her warm side, yet kept his bright eyes fixed either on the horses before him or on the face of his beloved sister seated on the other side. He thought she was wonderful in every way, and no general commanding an army in action received more admiration than did Gloria as she drove the horses over any particularly rough ground, or skirted the big holes in the road made by meerkats, or skilfully avoided an ant-heap.

It always seemed to him that Gloria knew everything, and when they reached the district in which the Vuurklip mine was situated he asked:

"Why is this called Luilekkerland? What does it mean?"

"It means Lazy-nice-land," Gloria explained. "Don't you remember I told you long ago of the land where the roast pigeons fly about ready cooked and the pigs have knives and forks stuck into them with-

out hurting, and they come and ask you to eat them, and if you lie on your back in the sunshine with your mouth open, the birds come flying round and drop in cakes and sweeties."

"Oh, yes, I remember; why, here we are already at the store, and why has your face gone so red, Gloria?"

"It hasn't," Gloria replied hastily and untruthfully, as she reined in the horses and smiled at a young man who waved his cap to them as he advanced from the doorway of the village store.

Mrs. Fairbain opened her eyes and remarked, "I will buy my new Kappie at Pietsrust, Gloria, but you may as well order the butter-muslin and sugar here; they will take the fowls in exchange; no, I won't get down; don't outspan, we haven't time; give me the reins; now, Johannes, you bide with me."

The fat woman took the reins and held them loosely, Claas went to the heads of the leaders, and Louis Martino helped Gloria to descend from the cart. The help was unnecessary, but it is so often the unnecessary aid proffered and accepted that sweetens a day.

"Why are you not in the mine?" asked Gloria of the young miner, when her feet touched terra firma.

"I go on shift in a few minutes," he replied. "When are you going to let me take you over the mine?"

"Oh, could I go really?" the tone was eager.

"Yes, the boss would not object, and it might amuse you."

"And should I see heaps of diamonds?"

"Perhaps, but more mud and much machinery."

"Still that would be interesting too. I will come as soon as I can, but we are always busy on the farm."

"I have a motor bike now," observed Martino in a tone suggestive of fishing for an invitation.

Gloria swallowed the bait and replied:

"Oh, then you must come and see us. Father would be pleased."

"And you?" the tone was a little eager.

"I? Oh, of course, but I mustn't stay here talking now. I must order the sugar."

Louis Martino was a Cape-Africander of good descent. He had been to school in England, and had none of the boorishness or the loathsome foppery which spoils so many Africanders. He did not respond with any fulsome compliment in reference to the sugar, or hinder Gloria further from entering the store, but, raising his cap again, he wished her good-morning and walked away in the direction of the mine.

Then Gloria entered the store, but she did not remain long. Used as she was to the roughness of country life, she never could overcome the repugnance she felt at seeing Dutchmen spit upon the floor of the store in all directions, regardless of the fact that in addition to wearing apparel, agricultural implements and household furniture, food was also sold there. Gloria was beautiful, and she adored cleanliness, and the heavy boots of the men who entered the store covered with mud and dust, always seemed to hurt her, no matter if the men were English, Dutch or Kaffirs. She had been used to it all her life, but at the back of her mind was always the thought that, if ever she had money, her father and little Johannes should wear the thin boots she had seen in pictures, while all the Kaffir servants should have extra wages on condition they wore no boots at all.

Then she ordered the sugar, ceased to look down at the floor, finished the business, and again seized the reins and faced the glorious veld, the sky blue above her, the grass in its young green stage beneath, and life and hope singing in the air as a breeze of Heaven-sent love.

CHAPTER II

THE winter with its months of drought and piercing cold winds was past, and now September, the month bringing the refreshing spring,* had come and the rains had re-opened the earth, the dried-up shrivelled grass of the winter veld had given place to the green carpet of early spring, and where desert barrenness had reigned, flowers had sprung up as though by magic in a few hours after the falling of the rain. Purple and crimson mesembryanthemums and variegated pelargoniums lifted their heads up from amidst the green of the young blades of grass, there were no singing birds to chant of the joys of spring, but the insects of the veld raised their voices in a low hum of gladness; yet timidly, for it was daylight, and only in the darkness does one hear the full tone of the chorus of the veld.

Mrs. Fairbain was of the kind of mother whose love for her child consists in keeping it warm, seeing that food is taken in at as great a quantity as possible with no heed to digestion, and keeping quiet while it slept. She had brought up her babies this way, and little Johannes in his feebleness seemed to her but a baby still, so she occasionally awoke from her sleep as the cart jolted over the rough road and proffered food which she carried in a basket at her feet, or rounded her arm so that the little lad might more easily sleep. She was a kind woman where bodily wants were concerned, but knew little of the requirements of the mind; thus to Gloria fell the task of amusing and interesting

* It must be remembered that the seasons in South Africa are the reverse of those in England.

the poor little chap when he refused food and could no longer sleep.

"Look, Johannes," she cried, pointing with her whip across the veld on the right to where a moving line on the horizon denoted the trekking of some springbok.

"How would you like to go years without a drink, Johannes? Sometimes those beautiful animals don't drink for ten years."

"And then I 'specks they want to drink a whole ocean," Johannes replied.

"Well, they get sometimes such a thirst that they never stop running till they find water. Uncle Petrus once saw a herd of springbok who had travelled across country in search of water, but alas! the only water they could find was when they reached the coast. They dashed into the sea and drank the salt water and died. Uncle Petrus saw the bodies carted away from the shore."

"I wish Uncle Petrus had died too," observed Johannes with compressed lips.

"Oh, Johannes, you must not say such things, and it is worse still to think them, for remember he is mother's brother, and if she heard you, what then?"

"She wouldn't beat me, she never does, but Uncle Petrus did once when no one saw."

"Hush!" said Gloria quickly, as though the idea was like a blow to herself, and continued:

"I also do not love him, but he is mother's brother, and I read in a book the other day, though I don't know quite the meaning, but it sounded like truth, anyway it said that blood is thicker than water."

"And sometimes does not smell so sweet," said Johannes sharply, adding, "Mud is thick too——"

"Ach!" exclaimed the fat Colonial mother waking up, "was it mud you said? Look out for the spruit, Gloria, the rains have swollen the river up above, and there is a swift current——"

"All right, mother; you hold on to Johannes when we get to the bank, or he might fall out on to Rubie's

back and look like the outrider to the royal carriage. You know the picture in the magazine father brought from the mine library."

"Look after the horses, girl, and don't talk," her mother replied.

The four horses were running well together.

"Now Ruby, steady Paul, up Fairplay, quiet Ned," cried Gloria, and with a quick movement she placed the whip in its socket, and gave all her attention to the reins.

They had reached the bank leading down to the spruit. It was damp with the recent rain, the horses descended slowly, carefully, one of the leaders slipped a little, but Gloria's firm hands had the reins well in hand—no one spoke, yet no one thought of fear. One is used to rough roads in South Africa, and when the rains come one is so thankful, that the additional danger in transport is rarely thought about. "Cross the river before outspanning" is a Dutch proverb, and so long as one has daylight to cross in, one thinks only of getting through, and does not expect ease in the going. If one waits to cross till daybreak and camps on this side, the chances are one will never cross at all, for the rivers quickly fill and run swiftly when the rains fall.

At the bottom of the bank water about a foot deep was running over stones. The leaders did not hesitate, but fearlessly set their hoofs upon the slippery stones, the wheelers were still on the bank, the wheels of the cart sinking in the mud.

"Up, Ned! Ach, Fairplay, go on, will you?" cried Gloria, and then she half rose in her seat, pulled forward by the reins, for the leaders had plunged into the water up to their girths, the wheelers pulled the cart off the bank with a jerk into the first depth of water, and Gloria was on her knees on the footplank. But she did not let go of the reins. Like lightning she was up again and on her seat, her eyes fixed on the leaders, who by now were struggling up the opposite bank, and the wheelers needed all the help she could give in holding them up.

The top of the bank was reached, and the panting, trembling horses paused to regain their breath.

Then Gloria for the first time turned her head and looked at her mother and little brother.

"Ach, Gloria, I hope the water will go down before we return," observed the fat woman loosening the scarf she wore wound round her neck.

"If Gloria was a horse she would have broken her knees," observed Johannes looking at Gloria with big, enquiring eyes, his face a shade paler than usual. "Do your knees hurt?"

"They burn a little," said Gloria, letting the reins slacken as she gently rubbed first one knee and then the other.

"Give me the reins a minute, child. The horses need a breathing space; go and bathe your knees. Where is Claas?"

"Here, missis," replied the native, coming round to the horses' heads and standing there while Gloria went off a little way behind the bushes to bathe her knees in the stream that helped to feed the spruit. The horses, badly in want of a few minutes' respite, needed no one to hold them, but the Colonial woman is sensible and allows no native, however trustworthy, to look on while a white girl unbare even her knees.

"Drift no good, missis," observed Claas, looking at Mrs. Fairbain and then nodding his head in the direction of the bank they had just come up.

"Plenty water, but spruit very, very bad, better crossing on Jan Wessel's farm; post-cart boy said."

"Then why, you schelm, didn't you say so before?" demanded Mrs. Fairbain.

"Missis no ask," Claas laconically replied.

Gloria's knees were badly bruised, but she made no complaint as she mounted again into the cart; what was the use? Grumbling would not have eased the pain, and only have annoyed her mother and worried little Johannes. She drove on, and without further adventure the town of Pietsrust was reached.

It is always interesting to trace back the origin of

a name or the beginning of a town or formation of a new colony.

In the case of Pietsrust, tradition tells us that in the far distant past, the Baralong, under their powerful chief Morolong, came down from the far, far north and eventually settled on the fertile country on the banks of the Moloppo river. After they had lived there for a number of generations, they had extended their kraals far beyond Segomapoort and a long way down the unusually (for South Africa) fine river Metsi-Mashwane, until the narrow place known as Pitlanganyani, where this river flows through the range of hills known as Moshweu, had checked their further advance.

Here they were attacked by the Matabele under the dreaded Moselekatsi. In 1836 trek Boers, as the emigrant farmers were called, entered this country, and very soon made an alliance with the Baralong for the purpose of attacking Moselekatsi.

The combined forces moved north, and the Boer general, Piet Hendrik Potgieter, made his last laager on the banks of the stream where to-day Pietsrust stands.

These laagers, or camps, were formed for defensive purposes, and were made by the ox waggons being brought up into a large square, inside of which men and women and children and the horses and cattle were considered safe during the night.

The pole of one waggon was firmly secured under the body of the next waggon, and as a rule the space under and between the waggons was filled up with branches of the thorny mimosa or the still worse Kaffir-wacht-een-beetje (Kaffir wait-a-bit, so called after the thorns which grow in two directions and invariably compel you to slacken your speed), so that an entrance into the barricaded enclosure could not be effected without forcibly tearing away and removing these obstacles.

Any such effort was generally successfully frustrated by the straight-shooting Boer, whose wife stood behind him loading the guns.

Potgieter succeeded in defeating Moselekatsi, the terrible "Old Lion of the North," and in his honour the new settlement on the river was called Pietsrust, and gradually a thriving town sprang up.

The Fairbains put up at one of the three hotels, choosing the one by the river, not so much from a love of nature, but because it was the one they had first known, and conservatism runs strong in the rural blood. It was not possible to see the doctor before the next day, and after the long drive from Clevedon they were all glad to go early to bed; not even the attractions of a bioscope in the town tempted them to go forth in search of amusement.

Before going to bed Gloria waylaid Mrs. Peters, the wife of the proprietor of the hotel, and begged a little fresh butter to put on her knees. By now they were turning black, and she earnestly hoped she would not have a similar experience on her return journey, and felt very thankful that at any rate her knees were suffering and not the horses. She mentally decided that if possible she would start away at a sufficiently early hour to enable her to ascertain if the spruit could be crossed in some better part, but that of course would need time for investigation.

Farm life accustoms one to rising early; Gloria awoke next morning at her usual hour, gave a sigh of luxurious ease and listened to the native servants in and outside the hotel clinking their buckets as they cleaned, and talking, always talking, even at that early hour their tongues wagged as though they had not met for years and had all the affairs of the nation to discuss before breakfast. Pat, pat, pat, went their naked feet along the passages. Then in the street outside a waggoner called to his oxen, and away, afar off, the shrill whistle of a train sounded, and Gloria was glad that they never stayed at the hotel by the station, where the noise of shunting went on all night and travellers arriving or departing stayed at that hotel a few hours or a few days, but, so she had heard, always making much noise, and noise was the one thing Gloria felt she could hate man-

kind for producing. The sounds of nature were never discordant, but man-made noise always seemed to jar upon her sense of beauty and love of peace.

Then Gloria rose and went for a walk down by the river.

There are river lovers in England and elsewhere in plenty, but in South Africa most people are consciously, or unconsciously, water worshippers; drought is the fiend which brings ruin to so many, every raindrop is prized, but not saved or stored as it should be. In South Africa the farmers have still much to learn in this direction. The distances are so great that the majority of the farming people dwelling inland have never seen the sea, and a river that never runs dry is to all South Africans a wonder to marvel at and a place to visit; the water is such a rest to eyes and brain after gazing everlastingly on miles and miles of veld and mealie fields.

To Gloria this river was a spot of fairyland. She imagined that no place on earth could be more beautiful. She looked with awe at the large willow trees whose branches and foliage grew down to the water's edge. She considered the pretty birds with the scarlet feathers who build such fantastic hanging nests as being something beyond mortal ken. They owned no relationship to the veld birds; these little river birds were spirits of the water, and she was quite certain that some very wonderful fairy god, endowed with miraculous power, must have placed the water here, and saw to it that even when the rains were late, this special river did not dry up. The little birds, of course, they knew all about the secret, but they never told, perhaps that was the reason why they were so silent yet looked so wise. They must be unusually clever, for their nests were so strangely woven, like hanging bags of brown lacework.

What a wonderful thing life was. How came it that people ever were discontented or malicious? And a cloud passed over Gloria's face as she recalled her Uncle Petrus Dutoit, and she remembered what little Johannes had said. Yes, Uncle Petrus belonged to

the discontented, malicious ones of the earth, to be classed with snakes and other disagreeable things, and yet how tolerant was her father towards the brother of his wife, this tall man with the light beard and moist hands, who was always going to do something very clever, but seemed contented to loaf about their farm and borrow money and incessantly grumble in the meanwhile. Yes, Uncle Petrus was a cloud in the horizon, but even he had not the power to withdraw the beauty from life, the happiness from existence. Yes, life was beautiful, and God so good. Why, even little Johannes might get better some day. Then there was a bond on the farm of two thousand pounds owing to the bank, and no prospect of paying it off. Still, there was only the interest now to be considered, and the next crops were certain to be good, and father had been so clever to buy those last heifers so cheaply, and what nice kind eyes Louis Martino had, and the colour deepened a little in Gloria's cheeks as she thought of the young miner. She bent down still closer to the water's edge, and her heart beat time to the song without words sung by the river.

When Gloria returned to the New Hotel the breakfast gong had sounded, and she found her mother and Johannes already seated at one of the little tables, with one of the Kaffir waiters clad in white taking their orders. The Indians have so far been kept out of this district, and as white waiters are too expensive, one has to be attended to by Kaffirs, which during the hot weather is not always pleasant. Indians make more desirable waiters than Kaffirs; they are better built for the purpose, their hands and feet being so much less clumsy and their odour not so unpleasant, but one accepts that which one is used to, and Gloria seated herself opposite her mother and thought of the novelty of breakfasting away from the farm, and ordered a kipper and a bloater, as these were novelties, for fish, even when dried, was a rarity at the farm.

Although breakfast was served at eight o'clock, still everyone staying at the hotel seemed to have come down for the meal, and several tables were occupied.

At this hotel there were not many commercial travellers as a rule, for they preferred to stay nearer the station, but usually several honeymoon couples were in residence, for the sea being too far away, they came from all the towns upland hither to honeymoon by the river instead, and young Colonial girls, whose only beauty lay in their youth, awkwardly entered the room and slyly sat by their equally awkward husbands, the latter usually wearing very new boots, and seeming to be visiting an hotel for the first time in their lives. These couples generally sat in absolute silence, only opening their mouths to eat, and when they asked each other what they would take, speaking in whispers as though the room was a church or a tomb.

Gloria looked round her in an interested, enquiring way, and decided, after studying the honeymoon couples, that married life in its initial stage looked very dull, and could not understand why her mother, in between the attention she paid to making a very good breakfast, was always looking at one and then the other of these obviously newly-married couples, and would first give an expansive smile to herself of approval and then sigh.

"What are you thinking about mother?" she asked.

"Ach, Gloria, it is wonderful to be a bride," she replied, taking a tender piece of haddock off her plate, and putting it on the plate of Johannes.

"If ever I marry I won't stay in this hotel," remarked Gloria.

"Why not? It's cheap and the food's good. Don't put on airs, Gloria. This hotel was good enough for your father and me."

Gloria's eyes grew bright and luminous.

"I think I would want for the first time in my life to see the sea," she replied, "and stay in no hotel or house at all."

"Ach, Gloria, jy is mal" (you are dotty), Mrs. Fairbain responded, and little Johannes wistfully whispered:

"Don't marry at all, Gloria. I'd hate the man

who took you away. I think I'd get strong enough to kill him, I'd hate him so."

"Don't worry, sonny; no one will want me, so don't fear," she replied gaily.

"There's Mr. Tom Hillier, the manager of the Vuurklip mine, looking your way, Gloria," said Mrs. Fairbain, setting down her fork and nodding away at a man who sat at another table some distance off.

"Well, he is married, so he may look," observed Johannes indifferently.

Gloria bowed, and enquired in a whisper:

"Who is the man with him, mother; do you know?"

"That's Mr. McGreedy, the Managing Director. I s'pose he's come from Jo'burg by the night train. I wish your father could sell some more of that forage to the mine."

"Perhaps Mr. Hillier will take it," said Gloria hopefully. "He trusts father, but he said he had had to give up buying from any of the Dutch farmers round because they put stones in their bundles to make weight."

"Don't you say nothing against the Dutch, Gloria. They're as honest as the rest of the farming folk, I reckon, but there are some bad ones in every district, and maybe Mr. Hillier struck the worst. The Dutch aint more slim than other folks."

"All right, mother dear; but you know you did marry an Englishman, and you are more of French than Dutch descent yourself, and it really was you and not father who said, 'Never lend the farm implements to a Boer.'"

Gloria spoke laughingly and teasingly, and the good-natured, fat woman replied:

"Ach, Gloria, it's what tante Caroline always said, and I mind her teachings and am careful. Now, Johannes, you just wipe your mouth; it's covered with egg and the doctor will be expecting us just now."*

* "Just now" is an expression used a great deal in South Africa and means "soon."

CHAPTER III

THE renowned doctor from Johannesburg saw Johannes and pronounced all possibility of absolute cure hopeless. Never could the crooked limbs be straightened, or the bended back be made flat, but—and that seemed much more important than anything else—he was equally certain that he could ease the neuralgic pain from which the little lad so constantly suffered, and when Mrs. Fairbain had replied, “Ach, but he has seen so many doctors and they all said the same, but the pain came back.” Still he remained of the same opinion, and so certain was he, that Mrs. Fairbain consented to remain in Pietsrust for a fortnight or three weeks, during which time Johannes was to have special treatment, and it was arranged that he should go to the local hospital as a paying patient, and the nurse carry out the treatment under the direction of the doctor. Gloria felt a little worried as she thought of the expense it would entail, but Johannes was his mother’s Benjamin and “Ach,” the fat mother said, “we must increase the bond or sell some cattle.”

And so, without waiting to consult the father, the matter was arranged and Gloria had to drive back all by herself to break the news to Mr. Fairbain. It was out of the question that she should remain, she was needed on the farm, besides the horses must go back, they could not spare all four just then, they were required for farm work and it was no use to waste time by lingering in Pietsrust, so Gloria, as soon as the matter was decided, said she must go off to the stables to hunt up Claas and see to the in-spanning.

“Wait till after lunch, Gloria,” little Johannes pleaded.

"But, dear, I must cross the spruit before the sun sets," Gloria replied, "and you know I must get back as soon as possible, father will be anxious to hear all the news."

"But you won't come back to Pietsrust, perhaps, all the time I am here, Gloria, and it's only one more hour," Johannes still pleaded.

"Which always means two, sonny, but I'll stay; with the four horses I can do it easily."

So Gloria stayed and lunched with her mother and Johannes, and Claas was told to inspan the horses at two o'clock sharp.

Mr. McGreedy and the General Manager of the Vuurklip mine, had left by motor soon after breakfast so they did not appear at lunch, but there were many other men present who all cast admiring glances at the bright, vivacious face of Gloria; bank clerks who boarded at the Hotel by the day and had a room out, and farmers, who, by the way, seemed to regard the menu not as a bill of fare to be selected from, but ate steadily through determined to eat their half-crowns worth. The latter were heavy looking men with sun-burnt faces and large, coarse hands, slouching gait, and unbrushed hair. But, in addition to their interest in food they looked long at Gloria and decided that she was, indeed, a prachtige noóie (a beautiful girl). The young townsmen thought it a pity she should be wasted on a farm, they had so few really pretty girls in Pietsrust, while the married women always lost their looks quickly and usually became careless as to their appearance. Of course, there were exceptions, but the majority make or mar a place, beautify or disfigure it—the English people blamed the climate, if taxed with their indifference to the cultivation of either flowers or comeliness, the Dutch considered everything useless that could not be either eaten or converted into money. Pietsrust possessed so much natural beauty, it was a pity that apart from the river, there should be so little to please the eye.

Gloria thought how tawdry the faded imitation

flowers on the tables looked and wondered why, with such a valuable asset as the river, no one thought it worth while to grow flowers for the market and only a few of the inhabitants of Pietsrust had flower gardens even for their own enjoyment.

"Some day I will grow enough flowers to send them with the butter to the market," Gloria said.

But Mrs. Fairbain shook her head as she replied :

"No one has money for flowers, too many mouths to feed, and when there is money saved there is always extra land one wants to buy."

"I cannot understand the craving for more and more land, I have heard father say the Boer will borrow and starve himself and let the children go almost naked in order to acquire more and more land and yet he often does not properly cultivate the land he already has," said Gloria.

"It means farms for the children someday," Mrs. Fairbain replied.

"Yes, that is the excuse," said Gloria. "But I believe it is chiefly love of possession, I rather fancy, too, that the dog in the manger was a Boer dog," and Gloria's eyes twinkled saucily as she said this.

"Eat," observed Mrs. Fairbain, "and then get the horses inspanned and don't forget to call for the sugar at the store as you pass."

"And give my love to father and tell Abraham that he can have my clasp knife if I die and don't go back," said Johannes, feeling rather important and a little of a hero as is the way with invalids.

"Shut up, silly, of course you will go back, so I sha'n't say no such thing," Gloria replied quickly, a lump rising in her throat.

"Any such thing," corrected Johannes. "You told me the other day I was to say that."

"Yes, of course, but how can I remember grammar when you talk nonsense? No, thank you, mother, I don't want any pudding, I am going right away to have those horses inspanned."

Off went Gloria, but soon returned with a frown

on her pretty face to say that Ned had gone lame in the off foreleg.

"Then leave him behind and drive the three, Ruby can lead; tell Claas to alter the swingelbars," observed her mother.

"No, mother, after all I shall be alone except for Claas, and no luggage. I could manage with the two, the rest will do Ruby good, and we only want Fairplay and Paul on the farm for the present."

"But the Spruit?" asked Johannes.

"Oh, I will cross that before the sun sets if I hurry a bit," cried Gloria, and proceeded to draw on her old brown kid gloves and tie over her straw hat a faded blue chiffon motor veil, for farmer's women-folk in South Africa, who have never even been inside a motor, have adopted motor veils and found them of good service.

The farewells were made, Mrs. Fairbain and little Johannes stood outside the Hotel in the shelter of the pepper trees and watched Gloria depart, and with them stood Mrs. Peters, the wife of the Manager of the Hotel and Dyke, the native hostler boy and a couple of rough, wire-haired dogs who always seemed interested in the arrival and departure of the Hotel guests.

Up the high street, Gloria drove, past the Commercial Hotel and very soon was on the rough road leading across a vast expanse of veld. As Gloria had predicted, many little delays had occurred, making the one hour two, so that it was now close on three o'clock as she left the town behind her, and with only two horses it would take her all her time to reach the drift through the Spruit before the sun set, for the horses must get a breathing space now and then, and it seemed that it would be next to impossible to spare the time to explore the Spruit in order to find a better crossing.

"Can't be helped," said Gloria to herself, and she called to the horses cheerfully, "Fairplay, Paul."

For some miles the veld rose in a gradual incline

and though the horses were fresh from the rest of night and morning, still they had run some three and thirty miles the previous day and the sun was unusually hot. Fairplay and Paul took the hill gently and seemed in no hurry to run away with their fair driver.

At the top of the rise, Gloria called a halt and let them breathe for a few minutes while she gazed around at the vast plateau surrounding her. Away, afar off, on the right rose the rugged crests of the Malabana mountains, covered with enormous stones and a few coarse thorn or mimosa trees, the heat seemed to lag over these Kopjes in heavy purple mists, between her and these hills were mealie fields. And in the distance, on the other side of the Zandspruit, Dikgagong, with Machudas Kraal, built up amongst the boulders. Like a collection of beehives, the huts appeared of far more picturesque appearance than the ugly stone or brick houses of the Boers. On the other side again mealie fields and beyond them veld where the cattle grazed, seeming not to mind the rays of the sun as it beat down upon them. The land ahead appeared to lie somewhat lower and at this point the dumps of the Vuurklip mine could be seen and very often, when the clouds were in the right position, a wonderful mirage would appear. It seemed at such a time as though one looked towards a vast expanse of water with here and there islands rising up, while the dumps (huge heaps of earth from which the diamonds have been extracted) of the mine appeared to be hills high up in the air, and one seemed to see the mine long before one actually could see it, for the mirage was untrue as a will-o'-the-wisp and more misleading. Sometimes the mirage was very beautiful and the phantom water was as a great sea with ships appearing on it's surface, in reality there was no water in this part of the veld at all, but it seemed impossible to believe this when the mirage gave forth the fairy-like pictures and the sunlight actually appeared to be dancing on the water. To Gloria this was a never ending wonder and

to-day she paused and gazed long upon the phantom apparition in the far distance. And far in the distance, quite dim, like the top of a sugarloaf, there he was, Pietzynkop, this solitary hill, nearly 1,000 feet high, in the desolate plain, and forming a most wonderful landmark.

Then off they started again, but it was very annoying, when just as the horses had got into a good going pace and seemed contented to continue so, that a gate should be encountered on the road and Claas have to descend and to open it, by the time they had passed through and the gate been securely fastened, (there is a fine for anyone who leaves it open, if caught,) several minutes would be lost and the horses, naturally, have relaxed their pace. These gates are a great nuisance on the roads through the farms and could easily be dispensed with if the farmers were compelled by law, and the Government could assist them, to fence the main roads crossing their lands, it would be for their own benefit in the long run because the cattle would not so frequently stray and get "pounded" for being on another man's property. A "pound" is under a pound master who is a farmer, appointed by the Government to receive and keep stray cattle which the lawful owner can recover against paying the charges incurred by keeping and guarding the cattle.

Mile after mile had been traversed and the horses were covered with lather and Gloria was beginning to feel that she wished this was indeed Luilekkerland, and that cups of coffee grew on the thorn bushes, for she was hot and thirsty, and her knees still felt a little stiff from the bruises gained on the previous day. Gloria reined in the horses for yet another breathing space, looking at the sky and deciding that this must surely be the last rest before crossing the Spruit. Claas dismounted from the cart to adjust a piece of harness, and Gloria relaxed her hold on the reins and looked idly around. Growing in the veld quite near she saw a single blossom of the beautiful blue *Agaphantus*.

"See to the horses, Claas, I shall get down a minute," she said.

"Ja, missus," Claas replied.

And Gloria descended, feeling she must for a moment stretch her legs, and also she wanted to gather this flower. She thought she would press it in blotting paper, and send it in a letter to Johannes by the post cart in a day or two; for the post cart from Pietsrust came every morning to the Vuurklip mine, and left again on its return journey in the afternoon; about twice a week it was usual to send from the farm to Vuurklip to receive or post any letters, and how pleased little Johannes would be. He loved flowers of all kinds, but more than the garden flowers he loved the wild flowers of the veld.

The atmosphere on the veld is usually so clear that one can see with the naked eye for many, many miles, and objects that in other climes would pass observation, are discerned at a great distance. Also one can hear sounds from a tremendous distance away. When Gloria stooped to gather the flower, she paused before the flower had been severed from its stem, and bending as she was—listened.

It seemed to her that afar off she could hear a very faint cry of distress. She sank down still nearer to the veld and listened again, her head nearly touching the earth in a way that natives have of listening, but no further sound came, and she rose up leaving the flower ungathered.

That was an animal in distress, she thought to herself, and a very young animal too. It must be a lamb, and standing, she shielded her eyes with both hands and peered around in all directions.

The sun was already losing its power and had begun its descent. Gloria's eyes were accustomed to seeing through space, and after a few seconds she discerned, some distance away, a small object lying on the veld.

It must be an injured lamb and the sheep have gone and left it behind, she thought. Maybe it is motherless and the rest of the flock don't care. I

can't leave it to die, I must try and save it. She turned to Claas, the native and said:

"Claas, take care of the horses. I must see what that is over there. I will only be gone a minute or two."

"Ja, missus, lamb, missus," Claas replied, and tearing a twig off the thorn tree, he began to clean his teeth, well knowing the horses were too tired to run away.

As Gloria neared the suffering lamb, she turned her walk into a run, for again she heard its faint plaintive bleat. It lay on its back and, apparently, could not turn over and its eyes looked upward.

Then Gloria glanced upward, too, and a shudder of horror shook her from head to foot, for there, high up above, circling in the sky, she saw an immense Lammervanger, which is a kind of enormous brown hawklike eagle.

This bird has been known to carry away many a live lamb, for its strength is great. It flies in circles round and round in the air, and then having correctly noted the exact spot where the victim lies, ceases its circling movements, and quick and straight as an arrow, darts down and seizes its prey.

Gloria, when she saw the great brown bird with its fierce eyes and cruel talons circling above, knew that she had not one second to lose, and she darted forward to where the lamb lay. Her's was true courage, for she went to the rescue, although filled with fear.

She reached the lamb just a second before the bird had ceased to circle. She knew that once it swept downward, no power of hers could save the lamb, unless, indeed, she covered it with her body, and then she would probably have her own eyes picked out. Each circle might be the last. She gave one terrified glance upward, then seized the lamb in her arms and dashed away towards the left of where it had lain. And not a second too soon, for the bird had marked its prey and located it. Down it swooped, just as Gloria sprang to one side. Without waiting

to look back, Gloria ran, and ran, and ran, holding the lamb clasped to her bosom, nor did she stop until a rough stone tripped her up, and then she and the lamb rolled over on the rough, hard grass of the veld together.

But Gloria did not stop to look behind until she had again picked up the lamb, which by now had ceased its bleating and seemed more dead than alive as it lay in her arms. Then Gloria paused and looked backward, and saw the Lammervanger on the veld some distance away from her, looking about in a, doubtless, surprised manner, so certain had it been of its prey. "Thank heavens you are not a Secretary bird and, therefore, do not run," gasped Gloria, and then looked all round to find out her bearings.

The cart and horses and Claas stood where she had left them, but alas! Gloria had run further away than she thought, and in order to return, and yet avoid passing too near to the hawk, she would have to go further away still and return after walking many yards out of her direct way.

"Can't be helped, can it, lambikins?" observed the philosophical Gloria, as she looked lovingly at the poor little lamb she carried. One of its legs was apparently broken, and so it would be quite impossible to leave it behind, even if she set it right way up, for if the lamb escaped this hawk another would certainly find it. So Gloria picked up her burden and tenderly carried it back to the cart, her heart wildly beating all the time, for fear the hawk should mount and descend again, and this time be more successful.

At length, however, she rejoined Claas. Together they bandaged the little broken leg, and, having bound it up, Claas was told to carry it on his lap in the cart, or lay it down if it should seem easier that way.

Then again Gloria seized the reins and with falling spirits, looked at the sun.

"Missus no get to Spruit before sun he sink," observed Claas.

"Oh, but I must," cried Gloria. "When will the moon rise, Claas?"

"Not till after the dark come, missus. Spruit no good, Spruit very bad."

"Can't be helped," said Gloria once more. "We must make a dash for it and chase the sun."

Claas and the lamb were at last safely stowed in the cart.

"Now, Fairplay, up, Paul, you must hurry and race the sun, or it's a drowned Gloria I shall be."

And this time, making use of her whip, Gloria with set lips, and eyes staring at the road ahead, hurried the horses on.

CHAPTER IV

DRIVING against time, racing the sunset. This conveys nothing of terror to those who know the long twilight of Northern Climes, but anyone who has lived in South Africa will understand and sympathise with Gloria's plight.

When the sun has set in South Africa there comes an afterglow of golden glory; a wonderful hush and peace spreads over the earth, the wind, if it has been raging all day, sinks down with the sun; the birds maybe, take a last sip at the stream, and then they quickly fly into their nests, and the insects chirp loudly or the beetles begin to sing and the insects to hum. A strange stillness holds the earth for twenty minutes or, maybe, half an hour, but by then the light has already begun to go, and almost before one realises, the day has ended and the night has commenced.

Gloria knew that difficult as the Spruit had been to cross on the morning of the day before, it would possibly be much worse now, if the river above had continued to come down, for when a river in South Africa begins to move, after the flooding of rains, it moves rapidly, sometimes carrying trees and bushes, and even huts along with it. So much depended on the strength of the flood, on the height of the recent rains, on the force of the current of the stream, and should the sun have set before the drift was reached, then darkness would render the crossing well nigh impossible; a matter of danger certainly, and death perhaps.

Claas, with the apathy of the native, said nothing. He had quite made up his mind that the young

missis would not do it, and wished he had brought his blanket with him. For the nights in South Africa are cold, no matter how hot has been the day; and the prospect of a night out on the veld, with no blanket, did not please Claas at all. Still, the young missis was doing her best to urge the horses on, so it was not for a native to argue the point or pass an opinion, he ceased to think about the drive, it would be time enough to feel cold when he had to dis-mount, but instead, he looked at the young lamb and hoped it would die, for the young missis would then surely give it to him to eat—it had broken its leg, that was different from death from disease or unknown causes, and the white people—they were stupidly particular on these points, and always ordered the burial of the oxen, cows, or pigs, if they had died from disease; the natives were not so particular, they would eat anything in the way of meat, no matter what the cause of death had been.

“Up, Fairplay! Oh, do go on, Paul,” cried Gloria, and she looked with terror at the ball of light disappearing in the west so rapidly, yes, almost sinking out of sight.

Gloria had been told by her father of her birth during a wonderful sunset, she remembered his story now, and as she flicked the horses with the whip and urged them on, she felt subconsciously, the beauty of the changing colour of the skies. Yes, she had been born when the sun set, could it be that the sun would fail her now, and by its sinking lead her on to a watery grave? Cold beads of perspiration broke out on her brow, her hands felt numb, they were tired, not so much with the holding of the reins, as with the feeling of responsibility that acted upon the tension of her nerves and seemed to sap her strength from wherever she needed it most. It was not the possible prospect of having to spend a night on the veld that frightened Gloria, she could trust Claas, but the horses would perhaps take cold if outspanned and hobbled just at this part of the veld, and might develop horse-sickness, which in ninety cases out

of a hundred meant death, and her father would be wondering why she did not return, or, at any rate, send some message; for though the doctor's verdict had been given after the post cart had left, still she could have sent a letter by one of the carts going to the Vuurklip mine, for Gloria was a general favourite in the district, and everyone was willing to oblige her in such a matter if possible, or she could have wired to the Vuurklip post office, for there was an arrangement that any such wire should be taken on to the farm by a native on a bicycle, and adequate payment given. But instead of this, Gloria had telephoned to the Vuurklip store, saying that she was returning that night, and if anyone was driving down Clevedon way, her father could be informed of her intention. She therefore did not know if her father was aware of her movements or not, and if he knew, and she did not appear, he would be certain to think an accident had befallen her, for everyone was acquainted with the fact that the Spring rains had made the going heavy, and swollen the water in the spruit.

The last gate was passed, but here more delay occurred, for a number of cattle, having ceased to graze, had selected this special spot as a resting place, and Claas had to chase them away before Gloria could drive through.

So by the time Claas had shouted and yelled and waved a sjambok, many precious minutes had been lost, it would now take at least forty-five minutes to reach the spruit, and as Gloria reckoned this out in her mind, she saw the great golden sun sink down out of sight, and the peace of its passing spread over the veld.

There was no wind now, but chilly whispers seemed to float through the air and a greyness drew nearer and nearer changing in tone as each minute passed. Gloria bent a little forward, for her eyes, accustomed to the full glare of the sun, were beginning to tell her that darkness was truly near at hand. Still the air was so clear that objects far away could be seen,

and to any but a South African born, would have seemed to be near at hand. But Gloria knew the deception of vision, she even saw in the distance the thorn bushes that grew near the spruit, as a row of dark shadows they seemed. Between her and them was nothing but open veld, no obstacles, no gates, no cattle, and yet she knew that before she could reach those bushes, the night would have engulfed the veld in its mantle of darkness, and all vision be blotted out.

Then Claas spoke :

“Spruit no good, missis.”

“Spruit must be good, Claas,” said Gloria with a wry smile, tears of vexation coming into her eyes as she flicked the horses with her whip. “Fairplay ! Paul!!” she cried, but the calm of the evening seemed to have descended upon the horses also, they had fallen into the quiet jog trot with which they would travel far through the darkness perhaps, but without varying their speed, unless it should be to stand still altogether.

Gloria feared little from holes in the roadway, for these two horses were South African bred and in all probability would see the meerkat holes before she did. No, it was the darkness in which to cross the running water that she dreaded, a false step by the horses on a loose stone, a stumble, and cart, horses, driver and boy, might all be carried away in the current. It had happened to others before, why should she, Gloria, escape ? Yet she never thought of not attempting it. In South Africa one takes chances undreamed of in older countries. Maybe it is the youth of the colony that gives courage to the blood of its young, or one thinks more of the home at the end of the journey and the loved ones waiting there, and that eclipses the present danger.

It needed still a drive of ten to fifteen minutes before the bank of the spruit could be reached, when the last rays of light faded in the sky, the clouds seemed to join up and link together, forming a canopy of threatening heaviness. They became part of the

darkness, and yet one felt their nearness. No longer were the bushes silhouetted, and Gloria could only just see the backs and ears of the horses as they moved.

Darkness had come.

"Spruit no good, missis," said the voice of Claas.

"Light the lamps, Claas," said Gloria, reining in the horses.

Claas obediently descended, and striking a match, lit the candles in the lamps that overhung the wheels above the mudguards.

As he did so, Gloria suddenly felt the horses pull at the reins, and instantly she tightened her hold on them and listened. In the distance, coming nearer and nearer, could be heard the noise of the puffing, snorting, and by no means pleasant sound of an approaching motor bicycle.

"Mind, Claas," Gloria cried, as she turned the horses so that they should not see the bicycle as it passed, fearing lest the horses might be nervous and injure either themselves or the cart by plunging.

"Get hold of Fairplay," cried Gloria, and Claas obeyed.

They were close, however, to the roadway, and who ever it was on the bicycle must have caught sight of the little lanterns, for he slackened speed and, passing quite near to the cart, saw the native holding the horses, their heads turned not in the direction of the spruit, but from the roadway, so that a passer-by would not be able to determine in what direction they intended to proceed. Louis Martino, for it was none other than he on the bicycle, decided that they could not possibly have the intention of crossing the spruit in the darkness, and, therefore, it might be possible that the owner of the cart was a farmer's wife from near by, on her way to Pietsrust, though the Boers do not drive Cape carts after dark unless it is absolutely necessary. Still, they sometimes go if there is any possibility of a moon. The Cape-cart is quite a different vehicle to the heavy waggons in which Boers sometimes trek with oxen, moving on all

night in a slow, ponderous manner. A Cape-cart is more like the English dog-cart, but has larger wheels, though not as high, but it is a light vehicle.

"Are you going to Pietsrust?" cried Martino to Claas.

"Ja, what for baas?" asked Claas in his usual laconic manner.

"If you are I would be obliged if you could carry a small parcel for me to the New Hotel. It is a bit awkward to hold on my bike."

"Who is it, Claas? Go and enquire," cried Gloria, "the horses are quiet now. Ask the man not to start his motor bicycle too near, and come back quickly."

"Who are you, baas?" asked Claas. "The missis wants to know."

"Who is your missis?" asked Martino.

"The young missis from Clevedon, baas."

"Why, good gracious! What do you mean? What is she doing out on the veld at this hour? See, hold this upright so, it won't bite you," and Martino showed Claas how to hold his motor bicycle while he ran forward to the cart.

"Good evening, Miss Fairbain, are you going to Pietsrust?"

"No, I have just come from there. Good evening. Oh, yes, I see it is Mr. Martino. I am going home."

"You are not seriously thinking of crossing the Spruit, surely?"

"I must, father will be anxious. If it had only stayed light a little longer!"

"But you can't drive all the way to Clevedon to-night!"

"Oh, yes; if only we get through the drift, the rest of the road does not matter. The horses could go by themselves for the matter of that, they know every inch. It is only the Spruit. Now, please don't hinder me any longer, but go, and don't start your bicycle too near. Fairplay is a little nervous. How did you find the Spruit?"

"I? Oh, I got across much higher up at the Old Stone Drift and then struck the roadway again, but you could not get through at that point with a cart."

"No, I must go the same way that we came yesterday. Good-bye."

"But, Miss Fairbain, I couldn't let you go alone. Please allow me to go with you."

"No, no," said Gloria. "Really, I am not frightened, and besides, what about your bicycle?"

"I will hide it in the bushes. No one will be likely to find it before I return. Let me, at any rate, go to the drift with you and see what the water is like."

"Very well," replied Gloria, feeling that it was very selfish of her to thus delay his journey, and yet secretly rejoicing at the new strength his presence seemed to give her.

The bicycle was soon bestowed in the grass behind some thorn bushes, and Louis Martino mounted the cart and sat beside Gloria, while Claas sprung up behind.

It was not long before they reached the bank of the Spruit, and Gloria called to the horses and stopped their advance, while Martino descended, to find out, if possible, how high the water was. Claas also scrambled off the back of the cart and peered around.

Martino threw a stone and listened.

"It is pretty deep," he said.

"It was deep yesterday," Gloria replied. "But it is better in the middle of the stream, and not so very bad near the opposite bank."

"It has not rained since yesterday," observed Martino.

"But has the river started to come down?"

"Not yet, I think. Must you really cross to-night?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall go with you."

"No."

"Yes."

"But the cart will go better if not weighted too much."

"Yes, your boy must go over after, at a spot a little higher up. Do you hear, boy? You get across at the Old Stone Drift."

"Ja, baas."

"It is higher up on the right, a bit of a jump, but possible. The horses could not do it, for the opening, though narrow, is deep, and might mean broken legs. I got my bike over by tying it to a plank and afterwards dragging it over. A man the other side helped me. Now, boy, you stay here till I return if you think you could not find the place."

"Ja, I find it baas, I go now."

"Very well."

"And you?" There was anxiety in Gloria's voice. She forgot the danger to herself, and thought for the moment only of the danger to the man who wanted to help her.

"I, oh, I will walk and lead the horses."

"Walk? But the water will be up to your waist."

"A wetting won't hurt me. Come, if you insist on going, better start at once."

"Steady, Fairplay, now, Paul," said Gloria, as she sat herself more firmly on the seat and held the reins, while Martino went to Fairplay's head, patted the animal a little and then taking hold of the reins at the bit, started to lead the horses down the muddy bank into the drift.

Louis Martino was a man of strong build, and he needed all his strength, for at one moment, the wheels of the cart stuck in the mud and, afterwards, coming out, they seemed to slither too quickly forward, and Martino found that he had not only to encourage the horses, but more important still, endeavour to keep the weight of the cart off them. He knew that his shoulders would be black and blue with bruises the next day, but what would that matter? He now meant all, the danger of the going and the necessity of the

saving of the girl who sat so quietly and bravely in the cart. Then there came a plunge, and they were all in the water.

For a second only Martino lost his footing, then in an instant he was on his feet, clinging to the stones while the water swept past his legs, and he gripped the reins of the plunging horses, for they had slipped from the grasp of Gloria, who herself was clinging to the splashboard, having fallen forward.

"Are you alright, Gloria?" cried Martino, forgetting in his hurry to call her Miss Fairbain, and using the name that everyone seemed to know her by.

"Yes," gasped Gloria, struggling up. "Where are the reins?"

"Here, steady my beauties. Now then, a little more water and up the bank you go—quick—take the reins, Gloria, I can manage better so."

"Right, I have them," cried Gloria, and for a second her hand touched his as she leaned over in the darkness, then scrambled back to her seat.

The next plunge was not so bad, for the water was more shallow, and then, when the horses realised they had reached the rising bank, they rushed quickly upward, trained as they were to go slowly downhill and start upwards always at a run. When the top was reached they stood still, panting, covered with the foam of fear and the water of the river, mud, and dead leaves. The débris of the rushing stream clung to the cart, and Gloria, now that the danger was past, trembled too, as though a sudden ague had fallen upon her; then she thought of the man who had so bravely helped her. Where was he?

"Mr. Martino! Mr. Martino! where are you? Gloria loudly cried, alarmed, and almost her heart hurt her, it was beating so quickly, when, to her great relief, she heard a voice in the darkness say:

"Here! Your horses ran away from me when they reached the bank. Ungrateful schelms!"

"And you are not hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of."

"And what will you do now?"

"Go back to my bicycle, but not just here. One swimming bath in a night is enough."

"But you are wet."

"Yes."

"And you will go on to Pietsrust?"

"I must. I had to go in on business of my own, and intended returning at dawn, but when the boss, Mr. Hillier, you know, saw me going, he asked me if I would oblige him by taking in two letters he wanted particularly to go to the Johannesburg office by the Kaffir Mail. I can still catch that."

"But you must be wet through."

"All the more reason why I should keep moving. You are sure you can get home now?"

"Yes, and I don't know how to thank you."

"Then don't try. What is the name of your boy?"

"Claas."

"Claas! Claas!" shouted Martino. "I can't leave you till he comes."

"But you will catch your death of cold standing in your wet clothes."

"I will soon cure that by the ride on my bike. I can borrow some clothes in Pietsrust. Claas, is that you?"

"Ja, baas."

"Take care of the missus."

"Ja, baas."

"Good-night, Miss Fairbain."

"Good-night, and thank you a thousand times."

"Nonsense, it was a pleasure. Good-night."

Louis Martino had gone. Claas first lit the candles in the lamps which had gone out passing through the river, and then sprang up behind and again the horses started forward. They seemed to know that now they were on the homeward path, and good-naturedly did their best to hurry along the dark rough road. Gloria forgot that she had been tired, and now that fear had withdrawn its paralyzing effect, the reins no longer seemed to be too heavy for

her hands, the leather became as light as ribbon, the darkness ceased to weigh down as a heavy pall. Soon the moon would rise, and if only the clouds lifted, the end of the journey would be quite pleasant, and already in the distance, there arose before her—seeming as an enchanted city, the Vuurklip diamond Mine with its powerful arc lights and many illuminations. It was uncanny to come upon such a place in the middle of the open veld, so far from other habitations, a village in itself, and so brilliantly lighted, for the work went on all through the twenty-four hours, a night shift of men coming on when the day shift had finished. Thus for many miles away on a dark night, one could see this evidence of labour, and know that through all the hours, the row of machinery would continue, and hundreds of white men and thousands of black, work away, for ever bringing up the earth out of the great hole, and washing it and searching it for diamonds, the stones so sought after by men who want to make money, and worn too often by the women least merited to spend it. Stones, precious, yes, for their price is so often one of loss of life in the getting, and loss of virtue in the wearing. Was it God or devil who first named a diamond precious?

The mine past, the open country lay beyond. The horses quickened their paces. It almost seemed as if they smelt, even at that distance, the comfort of their stable, and surely they knew that a well-earned feed awaited them.

Mile after mile was traversed, and at length Clevedon was reached, and Mr. Fairbain, with his favourite dog at his heels, was at the gate, peering anxiously down the road, when the noise of approaching wheels gave him a feeling of comfort, and soon he knew that it was, indeed, his Gloria who had returned, and the dog barked his welcome, and Corneels, a farm boy, came forward and opened the gate before Claas had time to get down, and Gloria threw him the reins with a sigh of relief, as her father lifted her from the cart. Of course, she could have jumped unassisted,

but Mr. Fairbain loved his daughter dearly, and liked to feel her weight in his arms.

"Little Johannes?" he queried.

"Alright, father, I will tell you presently. The horses had better have a mealie mash with a few 'drops' of Dop in. They have had a stiff journey, and I am so hungry I could eat you, father, and so tired, I could sleep standing, I think. Take care of the lamb, Claas, if it dies I shall be very angry."

"Ja, missus."

And yet, when Gloria retired to her room a little later, she did not feel so sleepy as she could have wished. The natural re-action set in from the strain of all that had taken place, and, wide awake, Gloria began to live over again her anxiety and the meeting with Louis Martino. She remembered that he had called her "Gloria," and yet, when wishing her good-bye, he had addressed her as "Miss Fairbain." Ought she to have told him that henceforward he might call her "Gloria?"

After all he had probably saved her life, and certainly saved the cart from being smashed, and the horses from breaking their legs; had she been sufficiently grateful? No, of course not. She had just availed herself of his aid, and then allowed him to go away soaked to the skin calling her "Miss Fairbain," when naturally he would have preferred to call her "Gloria," and she had not given him any encouragement to do so. What a hard, ungrateful girl he must think her, and perhaps he would not visit the farm again, and—and—and—Gloria indulged in what is commonly known as a "good cry." She was physically and mentally worn out, and, therefore, analyzed herself with gloomy glasses and distorted vision.

Then sleep came, sleep—nature's sweetest gift, and healer of all woes, both real and imaginary.

CHAPTER V

A FINE morning in Johannesburg, the air "exhilarating," so some would say, "rarified" others might call it; for Johannesburg, the city of the golden calf, where all who go worship and many are blasted through their faith, stands some six thousand feet above sea level, and one breathes quicker and lives faster than further down on the farms. At this altitude, life is so different, both for the body and the mind. Johannesburg is a siren, the hair of gold, the heart of stone. She fascinates the evil doer and ruins the man or woman, who is sufficiently weak to have sentiment, the rich flourish, and the poor become less than the hot red dust beneath their feet.

Some say justice is blind, she is also often deaf and not infrequently dumb, but in Johannesburg she loves the smell of gold, and she smiles upon whoever brings it in sufficient quantities. Some say gold has no odour, in Johannesburg it has; in fact, there it often stinks! It is said in England that God made the country, man made the town, the devil is not mentioned, because at that time His Satanic Majesty must have been very busy with schemes for Colonial towns, villages and dorps, and finally decided that Johannesburg should be the capital. This being so, it is only natural that a special breed of satellites should be forthcoming to people these towns, and this chapter deals with two of the devil's special favourites.

King Snyman left his hotel in Bree Street at half-past nine on this very fine morning and walked up over Von Brandis Square, down Pritchard Street, towards the Post Office. King Snyman was a tall chap, fair and florid, his inflamed eyelids suggested whisky rather than exposure to the sun, though his

shaven cheeks were tanned with sunburn, tanned as a fair man only is tanned, a rather shiny red, which occasionally obtains a brown hue, but never the sallow tint of a dark man. He wore a moustache which helped to cover his ugly, brutal mouth and discoloured teeth. His hair was brown, his moustache inclined to be golden, he walked with the careless slouch some large men have, and his wrinkled, unbrushed clothing looked as though he not infrequently went to bed without considering undressing necessary. It has been said that Paul Kruger slept in his trousers. King Snyman had often embraced Morpheus without even taking off his coat. He was in fact, from many points of view, an unclean man, but he had brains and used them.

He had been machine man on the Fanny Margaret diamond mine, which mine had yielded large numbers of fine garnets and beautiful olivins, but only so few diamonds, and those of such an inferior quality, that the frenziest efforts of the Directors had failed to induce both the shareholders and the public to hand over any more money to these Directors to enable them to go on.

It is quite true that the shareholders had been allowed to have "a run for their money," as it is called in the lingo of Finance, which usually means, that as a special favour they were allowed to buy, when the shares were high, and had to sell when the shares were low. And what a ghastly failure "Fannies" had proved! For not in a single instance did the results come up to expectations. So-called "experts"—who on many previous occasions had been proved to be unreliable, but about whom it was convenient for the directors and promoters to have a short memory—expressed unbounded confidence in the future of the mine. One of them declared himself satisfied that owing to the discovery of the Fanny Margaret Mine, the Colony might justly claim to rank as the most important mining country in the world; another one, with half the alphabet behind his name, was convinced that, owing to the

proximity of the Osspruit, where some blue shale had been found together with some sandstone, that the mine would prove to be larger and richer than any known diamond mine, etc., etc.

Based on these opinions, the Directors had no hesitation in inviting the public to subscribe to a venture which undoubtedly would become the largest diamond producer in the world.

The public, however, had become used to and tired of these prospectuses, and therefore required more than such testimonials before subscribing further capital; ultimately the property had to be abandoned as worthless and all the employees were dismissed.

King Snyman had been in charge of the machinery on the surface of this mine as machineman when it was closed down. He lived for a time on his savings and "profits," then loafed round and "touched" his friends, and all sources of this nature eventually running dry, finally decided he would seek employment again, so wrote to an old pal of his, a solicitor practising in Johannesburg.

It was of this solicitor that King Snyman was thinking, and to his office that his steps were now bent. He had an appointment for ten o'clock, it now wanted but five minutes to the hour according to the Post Office clock, and soon he found himself in Commissioner Street, and mounted one of the new American skyscrapers, where, on the 17th floor, he alighted from the lift and gazed at a large board which decorated the outside of his friend's door. The board was of black wood, on which brass plates were screwed. He paused and read the following inscriptions:—

" A. Vancohn,
Attorney at Law,
Solicitor to

The Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. Ltd.
The Not-yet-found-out Goldmining and Extracting
Co. Ltd.

The Limpopo Treasures Ltd.
Madagascar Nuggets and Oil Ltd.
The Fairy and Gnome Prospecting Syndicate Ltd."

And underneath a space was left, so that further brass plates might be added.

King Snyman smiled beneath his ragged, coarse moustache, and his eyes twinkled as he thought of the time when A. Vancohn had not been so seemingly prosperous, but under his own name—Abraham Cohn—had been glad of any job, no matter how small or how dirty. True, he was still open to do work of the latter description, but now objected to its being too small, one might in fact say that he had given up being an area sneak thief, and promoted himself to the more exalted position of a financial burglar.

Mr. A. Vancohn was a thin man with a clean shaven face and smooth dark brown hair. He had cultivated charming manners, which he found of great use when dealing with the fair sex, and more than one woman had pronounced him as being quite a good imitation of a gentleman; for any women, except a promoted barmaid or an ex-waitress, considered him in her mind as a bit of a bounder, but as real gentlemen are so scarce in South Africa, had often accepted him in lieu thereof, some women being flattered by the attention of any man, and others thinking (erroneously) that they might at a future time find him useful. Men used him or were used by him, troubling themselves not one whit as to what his antecedents were or his character was. Nobility of name or nature counts not at all in Johannesburg, where a man is reckoned the cutest who can do down his friends the quickest, to the greatest monetary advantage to himself.

There are exceptions, yes, but they are only martyrs to the general rule. The average man who is cheated kisses the hand that robs him in the thought that he may get a little of his own back by waiting, watching, and perhaps picking up a crumb from the next financial deal. So they live, either crawling over, cringing to, or kicking under, Johannesburg, the cesspool of the financial world.

King Snyman entered the outer office and enquired

of one of the clerks if Mr. Vancohn was disengaged, adding that he had an appointment for ten o'clock.

He had not long to wait, but soon was ushered into the private room of Mr. Vancohn, which room was divided from the general office by double doors, and provided with two exits.

Mr. A. Vancohn, who, in the custom of solicitors, sat with his back to the light, looked up from his writing, then laid down his pen, and smoothed his narrow clean-shaven face with his long, thin fingers, as he said :

" Hello, King."

" Hello, Bram," responded Snyman, for this had been Mr. Vancohn's nickname in the old days.

King Snyman took his chair opposite Vancohn, on the opposite side of the writing table, and slouched his long body across the table.

" You got my letter? " he asked.

" Yes."

" And what are you going to do? "

" That depends."

" On what? "

" On you."

" Well, spit it out, Bram; get it off your chest."

" Have you given up drinking? "

" I am stoney broke, so of course I am sober."

" And must remain so."

" I am no fool. I work when I work, and go on the spree when my pockets are full. Ach! I never mix business with pleasure. I have had my bust, now I want to work. What can you get for me? "

" Well, I can get you a job as second machineman at Vuurklip, you know the mine of the Luilekker people. I am a Director and Solicitor to the Company." Mr. Vancohn's voice grew softer and more silvery in tone. No one the other side of the room could have heard what he said, and certainly no one listening outside either of the double doors. His eyes were not eager, merely cold, and as he talked he looked either at King Snyman's face or toyed with

his own long thin fingers, seeming to admire his well manicured nails.

King Snyman spread his big arms and hands across the table and watched the sleek solicitor as he talked.

"We must make hay while the sun shines," continued Vancohn. "All these smaller mines will some day get closed down or bought up by the big syndicates, and then our game would be more difficult. Listen, King, you must go to Vuurklip, and as second machineman you will get lots of opportunities, and we will do our former business in the same old safe way. You must take good care not to take brown stones, but only white or yellow ones. The brown ones might betray us. Also, don't get back into your old bad habit of bargaining. Pay decently for good stuff, otherwise the others get it. Besides, they are now worth more than they used to be. White stones have gone up and fetch a much better price. And do not forget my lessons, once pinched finished for ever. Never pay the same day, only after you have them stowed away. Try and get one or two good boys to do the buying, you know it is safer."

King Snyman became really interested and his red-rimmed eyes took on a foxey look, he licked his lips under his ragged moustache, and avarice awoke from the sloath of it's recent whisky-fed slumbers, he became keen and consequently mixed up English and Dutch as he talked, for the latter had once been his sole language.

"Ach nee, Bram," he said. "You bet I know the tricks, you need not give me any more lessons. When will you be coming out to the Vuurklip mine? and, remember, I shall want twenty-five bob a shift and two bob overtime."

"Hush! speak a little more quietly. Don't be a fool about the five shillings, they are only paying a quid a shift. Why should they pay you more? Don't ask for it, don't make yourself conspicuous by appearing too big for your boots, accept the usual

wage and lie low. And you won't take to drinking again? "

"No d——d fear, you think I am going to make a hash of things. I'm no mug, but I haven't a ticky left. I shall want cash to go on with. I must have money to get there, and something in hand to start our little business with. Forty or fifty quid will do."

"Come back to-morrow morning," replied Vancohn, after thinking a minute. "I will get it by then in half sovereigns, that's what you will want. And how about your patent trunk? Got the trapholes still intact? "

"Ja, but been empty a long time now. Same old arrangements about profits? "

"Naturally, and, by the way, it will not do for the men and boys to tumble to it that you and I take any particular interest in each other; the first time I go out and find you working on the mine I will, if circumstances seem likely to warrant it, appear to be rather surprised to see you there; it will naturally depend who is with me, or if I am walking round the mine alone. I will let you know in good time when I am coming; if I am alone I can be surprised the first time I see you; if I have the manager, that honest fool Hillier, with me, I shall have to say good-day without surprise, as I shall have recommended you to him, and he might begin to wonder if I then ignored you."

"A pity the manager isn't in with us."

"He would be of precious little use, really, for you know as well as I do that as General Manager he rarely comes into contact with the stones. No, things are better as they are. And don't get mixed up with any woman, King; I can only trust a man so long as he keeps off alcohol and females."

"Not likely to be much in the way of petticoats round that mine, I reckon; too far off from the town."

"You know the district? "

"A bit, I've been to Pietsrust; and talking of petticoats, I saw there one day the prettiest girl I ever set eyes on, beat the Jo'burg lot hollow; she was just

getting out of a cart, my ! she could skip down in double quick time, and a man near said : ' Bravo, Gloria.' Pretty name, ' Gloria.' "

Mr. Vancohn smiled, and his slim fingers caressed his chin. He was fond of women, but cared little for wine, regarding women as toys for leisure moments, but wine as too dangerous a menace to the secrets of his profession. He was unmarried and had no intention of being otherwise, finding many women and girls among his clients and acquaintances, both obliging and kind. Still he feared the friendship of the female sex for his accomplice, well knowing that though his conscience was nil, still his senses were not always under control ; they never are with a man addicted to drink. So he observed :

" Then, if this Gloria lives at Pietsrust, keep clear of that town, King. Remember, no drink and no women, until we have had time for a good safe haul," and King Snyman replied, with a gleam in his red-rimmed eyes.

" All right, ou Bram, you reckon on me, ons zal darom banje klippies kry (we shall get heaps of little stones). And it will take a clever chap to find us out, alle wereld ja."

" Yes," answered Vancohn. " If you make no mistakes. You know my Natal people are perfect."

" Nee, ik zal nie mistake maak nie. Well, so long till to-morrow." And King Snyman drew his long legs up, and seemed to collect his heavy body and his felt hat at the same time.

" So long, old chap," Mr. Vancohn replied.

CHAPTER VI

GLORIA had plenty to see to and to occupy her attention on the farm in the general run of life, but during her mother's absence at Pietsrust there was still more to be done, for her mother had been in the habit of either doing or superintending the cooking. There was the bread to bake in the outside oven, and the meat to roast, boil or salt, and the fowls to truss and cakes to make, for the Fairbains were more generous in their hospitality and in their own diet than the usual Dutch farming class, and any visitor going to Clevedon was certain of getting what is generally known as a "square meal" instead of the cup of usually undrinkable coffee, which the Dutch vrouw is in the habit of offering and receiving.

William Fairbain had come of good old English stock, and in his boyhood had spent his holidays in the old country with fox-hunting squires and well-to-do farmers. Unfortunately his parents had bequeathed him little more than a fair education and generous instincts, and what little money he had possessed he had lost in bad speculations when he first arrived in South Africa, in the beginning of its palmy days. It was fortunate for him that the Colonial girl he met, loved, and wedded, had been possessed of a practical mind, and what counted to them of still more value, a good river farm, which she had inherited from her father, some time deceased. Her mother had died during the first years of Aletta Dutoit's wedded life, leaving her, alas, no money, but, instead, debts, which to pay off she, Aletta, had bonded the farm, and a worthless brother, by name Petrus, who having managed to lose the farm in-

herited by himself from his father, also had squandered his mother's interest in other lands, and now, with a head full of wild-cat schemes and a heart soured by dissipation and disappointment, practically lived upon his sister, although he, to all appearances, occupied the position of a bywoner, farming a portion of the land and sharing the profits with the owner, his sister. But, as a matter of fact, he did little or no work, lived in a small house on the farm some ten minutes from the Fairbain's homestead, but usually turned up at his sister's for his meals, borrowed tobacco from his brother-in-law, and when opportunity occurred, bullied or tormented his niece and nephew.

William Fairbain worked hard; he was no loafer on his wife's farm. It was he, in fact, who helped in every way to keep things going, for though he had been a little imprudent in his young days, he was at least a gentleman at heart, and loved his wife and children devotedly, and never spared himself in his efforts to further the interests of the farm. He had no love for his wife's brother, yet could not very well resent his presence, for he was sensitive and felt that others might even regard him in the light of a lodger also. Yet the fat Colonial wife knew the sterling value of her husband, and never reminded him of his former losses. She was a good woman, although not quite his equal in education. She, too, had no great love for her brother, Petrus Dutoit, but their mother had loved him, he had been her darling and spoilt boy. The sister felt she must do all she could for him in memory of that mother now dead.

William Fairbain had not only done his best to help make money, but many were the things he had gone without in order that Gloria might have some education better than that which the ordinary Boer could afford to give his daughter, and so for months he had eschewed tobacco and gone without his whisky, and purchased none of his beloved reviews and books, and in consequence Gloria had been to Kimberley to school, and could play the piano a little

and paint birds on glass, and flowers on china, with which to adorn the sitting-room, and sew in a far more fanciful way than the other farmer's daughters in the district. She took after her father, too, in many ways, and with him would share the tragic beauty of a storm, and note the radiance of the changing colours of the sky. They both loved the soft mists that veiled the distant kopjes and listened at times, hand in hand, to the song of the veld at night, or the fall of the rain. They found harmony in the lowing of the cattle, and felt the poetry of the scents of the seasons.

Gloria adored her father in a half shy and yet almost comprehending way, it needed more of life to make them know each other a little more thoroughly, and sorrow must come, before they two would solve the full sympathy of love, and the ties and bindings of filial affection.

For some time Petrus Dutoit had talked and hinted and argued with both his sister and brother-in-law, suggesting that as the Vuurklip mine lay only a few miles away there was some prospect that diamonds might also exist on the Clevedon farm, but even if they did not, the whole neighbourhood might, at any rate by some of the financiers, be considered as suitable for prospecting purposes, and again and again he urged that they might raise money by being paid for prospecting options, but Mrs. Fairbain, although she now bore an English name, remained Aletta Dutoit at heart, and in her was reproduced the love of the land as her father had known it before her, and her grandfather, and so on generations back, before mines were discovered or diamonds ever dreamt of. No, she wanted the farm to remain as it was, a farm and nothing more, and again and again she urged her husband to find out the law on this point, so that through no error on their part should the land be taken from them, and William Fairbain had satisfied her and himself, for he too loved the farm, that if the owner had not consented to any prospecting on his ground, then the farm could not be proclaimed a

digging, whereby it practically became public property.

If they accepted a prospecting contract and consented to the farm being prospected, then their claim to it remaining a farm only would cease, and once it should be proclaimed a digging, then it would come under Government control, and though the homestead might remain theirs, the lands, the veld, sour or sweet, the orchard, even the flower and salad gardens, all could pass beyond their control.

Therefore, to keep the farm intact, they must refuse every offer, no matter how tempting, to allow the farm to be prospected.

In vain had Petrus Dutoit argued, his sister remained firm on this point, and her husband naturally seconded and respected her wishes; but when it came to the ears of Petrus that his sister would remain at Pietsrust for some time with little Johannes, then again he made up his mind that he would try and talk over his brother-in-law. True the farm belonged to his sister, Mrs. Fairbain, but if only he could talk William Fairbain over to his way of thinking, he thought the battle would be half won, for he knew of the great love existing between them.

Petrus Dutoit belonged to the class of human beings who hate work and are always hoping for some lucky find or chance, which will enable them to spend the remainder of their lives in utter laziness. He loafed in a small way at present, drinking coffee and smoking bad tobacco hour after hour in his cottage, instead of working on the farm, but he had visions in his mind always of a more sumptuous form of loafing, with warmer clothes in winter, a house free from draughts, more boys to wait on him, a flash girl to amuse him, and big cigars with red and gold bands round them to smoke, and various forms of drink he had heard of, and as yet had never been able to afford to sample, and maybe some horses to run at the local races, that would make the other farmers open their eyes a bit. Oh yes, he thought he would be able to make money fly, once he had it; but how to get it?

Without saying a word to anyone, he started to nose around a bit. He had picked up scraps of prospecting knowledge from various men he had met from time to time, at Pietsrust, and on the farms around. At the Vuurklip mine he had become acquainted with men like himself, all on the look out for fortunes to be had for the finding rather than the working. Genuine prospectors had occasionally asked him questions, and from their questions he had learned much, while as for the look of diamondiferous ground and the kind of stones so often found with it, this knowledge was not difficult to obtain. He had drunk with some of the Vuurklip men, he had been over the mine more than once, he knew what "blue" or "yellow" ground looked like, and he made up his mind he would do a little prospecting on his own on Clevedon farm.

Petrus Dutoit was, in fact, the kind of man who is best described as a "slim Africander," "slim" in this case having in South Africa the same meaning that it has in America, and referring to the sly cunning of his character, and not to any slenderness of his form. He took to walking about the farm, pretending to inspect the condition of the fences and taking some interest in the reliability of the fastening of the gates. He smoked his Boer tobacco as he walked, instead of on his stoep, and one day his search was rewarded; he picked up a small garnet.

Now a garnet is, as most people doubtless know, a crimson stone of little value, but it always appears where diamonds are to be found. True there are sometimes many garnets and no diamonds, but never diamonds and no garnets. It is therefore considered a good omen if a garnet be found. Much encouraged, Petrus Dutoit continued his search, and some days later he found not only a garnet, but also a little "carbon," the latter being yet another good indication.

Then Petrus Dutoit started again to "sound" William Fairbain with regard to the advisability of

allowing the farm to be prospected, saying nothing, however, of the discoveries he had made.

But William Fairbain was obdurate; he had no wish to discuss the subject, and remarked that he further considered it unfair to do so while his wife was at Pietsrust.

It was during supper that the conversation took place, and Gloria, who was present, seconded her father's opinion.

"Mother loves the farm," she said, "and Oupa (grandfather) loved the farm, and little Johannes will grow strong and well, and then the farm will be his."

"He will always be a puny hunchback," Petrus Dutoit said sneeringly.

"Stow that Petrus," cried Fairbain, the angry colour mounting to his forehead.

"At any rate if his back remains crooked, his soul will keep straight," said Gloria, and she clutched the knife she was cutting the bread with, as though she would like to use it in a murderous fashion on her Uncle Petrus.

But Peter Dutoit was not "slim" for nothing. Seeing he was on the wrong track, he, for a wonder, did not continue his sneering; he had other game to snare than self-amusement. He wanted money badly and meant that through someone or something he would try precious hard to finger some. So instead of replying to Gloria taunt for taunt and sneer for sneer, he assumed a pitying tone as he said:

"Poor little beggar, it seems to me if any of you had any love for him, instead of prating of affection, you would show it in some practical way; the farm will never be worked by him, what then? Will he cover it with bywoners? or hire it out to dirty niggers? or sell it morgen by morgen? There is the bond on it to be thought of, too."

"Don't worry about that, we pay the interest regularly, the Bank Manager is in no hurry for the capital. Why should he be? The security is all right, the farm can remain as it is, and, what is more, it will remain as it is! So get on with your supper, Petrus,

and change the subject," said William Fairbain, holding out his plate to Gloria. "Give me some more of that mutton, my girl; we must kill a sheep again to-morrow."

But Petrus Dutoit was not to be put off in this manner.

"Now if a diamond mine should be discovered on this farm," he observed. "Think of the trouble in the future it would save! The bond could be paid off, Johannes might even go to Europe to see if the vets could do anything for him there, and you and Aletta could have a farm somewhere else, if you are so dead set on farming for ever; and Gloria now, there's many a good-looking chap would be glad to marry her if she had a bit of money."

"I don't want any good-looking 'chap,' as you call them," said Gloria. "And, after all, there may be no diamonds on the farm, and what then? All our peace gone for nothing, eh, father? Isn't that so?"

"Yes, you are right, Gloria. I don't believe there is a bit of coal even on our farm, and as for a diamond mine it is all bunkum. I say if I was paid for option, believing as I do that there is nothing on the farm, I should be a liar and a thief."

"The option money would come in handy though," said Petrus.

"For you to borrow?" asked Fairbain, his temper rising again.

"Nee, William, nee, you're too hasty to judge; it's my sister I am thinking about."

"Then wait until your sister comes back from Pietsrust, and see what she will tell you. Aletta will stick to the farm I know, and should there be fifty diamond mines under it she would much prefer a good mealie crop on the top. Any baccey left, Gloria?"

"I am afraid not, father. I think Uncle Petrus finished the last of it."

"Well, can't be helped, as you are so fond of saying, Gloria, but we will take care that Uncle Petrus doesn't finish up the farm, anyway."

Petrus Dutoit scowled at his brother-in-law, and kicking away his chair, strolled out on to the stoep, and looked forth into the night.

Gloria shivered as she watched him go, and said :

“ Father, I don’t trust him ; I feel he is going to do us some harm.”

“ Nonsense, Gloria ; he can’t.”

“ Yes, father, he can.”

“ How ? ”

“ I don’t know, I only feel it.”

“ That is no reason, my girl ; you womenfolk talk without reason or logic.”

“ But what we feel often comes true. I don’t think I am really a coward, but I fear Uncle Petrus. Yes, I am as frightened of him as I am of snakes. Just look at his back, I seem to see through that, and his heart is black inside.”

Petrus Dutoit swung open the mosquito-proof door of the stoep, and went away without one word of farewell. This was by no means unusual for him ; he was only civil when he had been given something or got his own way in an argument. His sister was ever ready to make excuses for him, but she was absent now, and William Fairbain and his daughter did not disguise the fact to themselves or to each other, or to him, that they held him in little esteem. He had hoped to talk them round a bit to his way of thinking about the option business during his sister’s absence, but now he wished she was back, for she smoothed life’s little irritations for him on all occasions, and although she loved her husband and daughter, yet was ever ready to take the side of her brother, except in the matter of the farm being prospected. On that point she was obdurate, adamant itself, in fact. She had the real Boer love of land, and always spoke with resentment of the mining industry, considered that only farming machinery should be allowed to enter the country, and was terrified at the idea of opening up the bowels of the earth in order to search for what she termed vanity and abominations. The farmers of South Africa had

managed to live before gold and diamonds brought the riff-raff of the world into the country, she would say, and she had no good word for the capitalists or sympathy with their workers. Used all her life to the farm, and knowing no recreation other than the *Nachtmaal*, the annual feast of the communion of the Reformed Dutch Church, or farm dances, she had remained the narrow-minded yet good-natured Boer woman, whose love only embraced her family, and whose sympathies did not extend beyond the farm. She was suspicious of strangers, and hated any idea of change, read no book save the Bible, and was only interested in crops and herds, or paid perhaps a passing attention to the births, deaths and marriages of her neighbours, but for all else she had no understanding. To spend even a short time in an hotel instead of at her own home on the farm was to her a great unhappiness, but little Johannes was her darling in every sense of the word. Doubtless his infirmity doubly endeared him to her, and, womanlike, she loved best the one who needed her most; yet she was ever longing for the day when she could return to the farm. Had she been able to see into the thoughts of her brother on this particular night, it is to be doubted if even the nearness of little Johannes lying in the hospital would have kept her from leaving Pietsrust and racing back to Clevedon in double quick time. But the thoughts of those who love us and the designs of those who hate us are often hidden from us, and hence the many misconceptions and miseries of life arise. Should the time ever come when we can with our minds x-ray the minds of others with accuracy, then the whole history of the world will change and life become quite different from what it is at present. The mere idea of such a possibility opens up a new, vast, in fact unending, vista of speculative thought.

When Petrus Dutoit stepped down from the stoep that night there was a heavy frown upon his face, a rankling enemy within his heart. He hated all his relations, even including his sister Aletta, who had

been so good to him. He was jealous, and jealousy is more cruel than murder, for it tortures so many and for so long. He turned down the garden path, paused a second to kick with the heel of his heavy boot a clump of white pansies. Their pale, delicate faces shone in the moonlight; they had been planted by Gloria. He detested Gloria and all her fal-lall, dainty ways and love of flowers. Then he passed by the hedge of prickly pears and found himself in the peach orchard, where he turned and looked backward at the house.

From an architectural point of view the homestead at Clevedon could certainly not be termed beautiful, for it did not resemble the old Dutch farmhouses of Cape Colony, but was of more recent date, and had been enlarged and added to from time to time as occasion demanded, so that very little of the former building remained as it had been erected some eighty or ninety years before by Aletta Dutoit's grandparents. But it was a comfortable house for all that, a long house of one story in height, and its windows flat and ugly, with the regulation pattern glass panes, bought because of quick delivery and cheapness. Any variation would have meant waiting weeks for the glass to come out to Africa, and then months maybe for it to be brought up from the coast and finally delivered. House building or enlarging in those parts meant either doing the work one's self, with the aid of native labour, or having a mason or carpenter as guests and paying high wages, as well as providing board and lodging. So William Fairbain had carried out many improvements himself, and it was at Gloria's suggestion that two of the doors leading on to the stoep should have all the panels changed from wood to glass, and thus additional light given to the house, and a view of the farm and distant kopjes possible from the inside. The stoep, too, had been gradually enlarged until now it ran round the whole house, while creepers had been trained to grow up the mosquito netting in such a way that no windows were darkened, but the whitewashed brickwork was hidden

by green foliage and flowers, while inside the netting the stoep afforded ample room for either sitting or sleeping accommodation. Gloria had often hinted that it would be a good place to feed on, but Aletta Dutoit clung to the stiff, ugly dullness of the dining room. She also had a parlour which was rarely used, a room filled with uncomfortable furniture, impossible portraits and other treasures, valued on account of their having belonged to the family for generations. The plaques and paintings of Gloria had been added, but looked incongruous, yet Gloria made no objection, for she knew that it was the love and pride of her mother that had placed them there. William Fairbain had a small snugger of his own, and it was in this room that Gloria had her piano, for, as she said to her mother, she could practise when her father was out, and thus the best parlour would not get upset. Her mother had been well pleased that it had been so, for no piano had ever been in that parlour, only a small harmonium, above which hung large oleographs of Queen Victoria and Paul Kruger side by side, facing the enlarged portraits of Aletta and William Fairbain; while on another wall, the parents of Aletta looked forth, and the grandparents adorned yet another wall. Yes, it was a wonderful room, and the smaller pictures, photographs and family groups would have driven an artist mad with despair, or convulsed a comedian with laughter; yet they were sacred as that which has received the homage of love or is the outcome of devotion should be sacred. There was a musty smell in the air, for the windows were always closed and the blinds rarely drawn up.

But it was not towards this window in particular that Petrus Dutoit turned his gaze—no, he was only interested in the homestead as a whole, and he clenched his clammy hands as he looked. Why should his sister still possess a farm, when he had lost his? Why should he sleep at the cottage near the "lands" when William Fairbain could dwell in this big house and smoke his pipe on the stoep, and offer coffee to the Boers who called, and flaunt his fine

manners and talk with his English accent and generally lord it, while he, Petrus, who had been brought up on the farm, should be little better than a bywoner now? Who were the bywoners but the lowest of the Boers, while he, Petrus Dutoit, his father had owned the land, yes, and again, his father's father before him.

The devil of jealousy raged within Petrus Dutoit's heart, and that night, by moonlight, he walked for hours about the farm, until at last he saw something on the ground before him, shining, caught by a ray of moonlight. It was not a scrap of glass, no, for the kraals where the native farm hands lived were some distance away. It was not a speck of solder off a sardine tin, no, for the main road passed not there. What was it then?

A tiny rough diamond! Surely the devil placed it there for Petrus Dutoit to discover.

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT has divers beauties, various fascinations, yet it is also a cloak under the shelter of which many evil doers creep, so that they may the more easily fulfil their machinations. The day is no stranger to crime, and bold-faced criminals may be as pestilent as those who burrow in the dark, but there are men who are cowards as well as criminals, and these prefer the dark. They gain confidence in themselves with the shading round of dusk, as owls become awake and alert when the pall of night makes of the day but a remembrance.

Of such a calibre was Petrus Dutoit, a man with lank brown hair and a beard inclined to be carroty, a swarthy skin, and grey eyes, too light for beauty, hands always moist and cold, the clammy skin one surmises Uriah Heep must have had, and which so many Boers possess. Petrus Dutoit had a tall, slender figure, a slouch in the shoulders, and large, flat feet stretching out in an ungainly way at the ends of his thin, shambling legs; his mouth, hidden beneath the coarse hair of his tawny moustache, was wide and thick-lipped, loose, yet at times cruel, while the expression of his face was at times menacing, but occasionally fawning. He possessed, in fact, the worst traits of the Dutch Boer, deeming himself an ill-used man, while he was, in fact, not only his own enemy but also the enemy of everyone with whom he came into contact. His sister Aletta, the mother of Gloria, was as unlike him in character as she was in appearance, she being dark and buxom, while her heart was kind, and her mind sought and thought no evil.

The small house Petrus Dutoit lived in on Clevedon was made of brick and consisted of four square rooms and a passage running from the front door to the back. One room was used as a kitchen, another as a living room, and the two others as bedrooms, Dutoit occupying one, the other being always in a more or less degree of readiness for any Boer who should be travelling that way and, alone or with his family, seek shelter for the night. The rooms were but scantily furnished and always in a state of disorder or uncleanness, for neither Mrs. Fairbain nor her daughter ever crossed this threshold, and the boy employed by Dutoit left it to his wife to see to, and she did as little as she possibly could, which in a native amounts to very little indeed.

Outside the house a few bluegum trees had been planted some years previously, and their tall slender trunks and small branches afforded little shade and no beauty. As for flowers, there were none, for the average Dutch Boer takes no pleasure in planting them. In this, he displays a lack of love of the beautiful to a degree so marked that one can hardly believe it possible that the Dutch Boer in South Africa can be related in any way to the artistic Hollander of Europe, so celebrated as they have been both for their artists and their wonderful bulb cultivation.

South African Dutch have neither personal beauty nor seem in any way to desire any education in art; their homes are ugly, and in the case of the lower classes, far from clean. Of course one must make an exception of the old Dutch families who live in the Western Province of the Cape, for though not very artistic in themselves, they have some beautiful homesteads, relics of the work of their forefathers. But art does not advance, and only the English help to keep any interest in it alive.

Petrus Dutoit, both in character and appearance, was not an exception. There are, unfortunately, many as crafty, as unscrupulous, and as physically lazy as he, a disgrace to the country, and apt to give a bad impression to those who have not the time or

opportunity of making the acquaintance of the generous-hearted and really hard-working Dutch.

The night was certainly the best time during which Petrus Dutoit could make his investigations on Clevedon. He soon acquired the habit of adding to his sleep during the day and wandering about the farm at night. He said nothing to anyone of his discoveries, but stealthily continued his search by moonlight. When he had collected some more garnets and carbons he decided that the time was ripe for a visit to Johannesburg. These garnets and carbons indicated a great deal, but in the opinion of Petrus Dutoit the rough diamond was the bait with which he expected to fish the most advantageously.

Petrus Dutoit had met Mr. Abraham Vancohn many times, both at the Vuurklip mine and Pietsrust, for it was the policy of Dutoit to smell out, so to speak, any man who seemed of sufficient power, or whose character betrayed such tendencies to deceit or depravity, that he might at some time or other be of use. Dutoit disliked so much any manual work for himself that he always had a more than sneaking regard for the man who, by his profession as solicitor, or schemer, was capable of robbing his fellow countrymen to his own advantage. Therefore Dutoit decided that the man for him to seek was Mr. Abraham Vancohn, both because he was a Director of the Vuurklip mine, and also because rumour painted him, if not exactly black, then more grey than white.

But even a trip to Johannesburg costs money, and Dutoit had none; so borrowing cart and horses from his brother-in-law, he said that he must go to Pietsrust to see his sister Aletta, and find out how little Johannes was getting on.

"We have seen you so little lately, Uncle Petrus, I thought perhaps you had grown wings and flown to Pietsrust," Gloria remarked, when he came round for a square meal and to fetch the cart and horses.

"I've had rheumatism, and a lot you cared! I ate what the boy cooked for me," replied Dutoit in a surly tone.

"And drank weak tea or whisky?" asked Gloria roguishly, for she and her father had quite decided that probably Dutoit was indulging in a drinking bout at the Vuurklip, or sleeping off the effects in his cottage, and they were too glad of his absence from their homestead to enquire as to his condition. Little did they dream that he slept by day, in order to spy out the land by night.

"You didn't by any chance eat a whole sheep?" hazarded Fairbain, as he examined the bit of one of the horses. "There's another been stolen this last week. I must get some more dogs and let them out at night."

"Don't do that," said Dutoit, a quick gleam lighting his pale eyes. "They'd only worry the cattle. I'll look round a bit for you at night when I get back."

"And when will that be? We want the horses. You'd better leave them at Pietsrust and inspan the two Gloria left there in their place. We are short on the farm. I suppose you will return to-morrow or next day certain?"

"Ja," replied Dutoit, getting into the cart.

"How's Bobs? Have you ridden him much lately? I'll send down for him while you are away. I want to ride round the lands, and the stallion is in the stable, off fore leg strained, and the mares I won't have ridden just now, so Bobs will come in useful."

"He's fresh," replied Dutoit, grabbing the reins. "Been nowhere 'cept to the Vuurklip a week ago."

"A week ago? So you really have been saying your prayers indoors all this time," remarked Gloria, handing up a parcel of goodies she had cooked, and was sending to little Johannes, in the hope that the Hospital Authorities would allow him to eat his favourite cakes.

"I tell you I've had rheumatism," snapped Dutoit, and flicked the whip to avoid answering more questions.

"So long," he shouted.

"So long," William Fairbain replied.

But Gloria said nothing until the cart and its rearing horses had swung past the gate, and then she remarked :

"Uncle Petrus drives with temper and not with skill. I wish he'd break his neck."

"Too expensive, my dear, if he smashed the cart as well," her father replied.

"I would not like to be his horse or dog," said Gloria. "I wonder what he is going to Pietsrust for? Of course he will see mother, but he isn't going for that, or to have his hair cut."

"So long as he keeps out of my way I don't care what he does, though we could ill spare the horses. I wonder why you are so suspicious of him, Gloria? He can't harm us, really. It isn't like you to fear anyone, and yet sometimes you look as though he was bringing smallpox in at the gate with him, or could ruin the harvest or something of the sort. He's a lazy sod, but that is all, and it's to his interests for us to prosper. He can then borrow more off your mother, and sleep for a fortnight if he wants to, instead of a week."

"I can't tell you why I feel so, father, but I do. I shiver as though a storm was coming when he is near, and I fear I know not what. He will bring trouble to us; I don't know how, but he will."

"Nonsense, girl. You're just like other women; no logic, no reason, just likes and dislikes. I'm glad I'm a man."

"So am I, otherwise you couldn't be my dear, silly, conceited father. Well, let's forget Uncle Petrus. He's just a nasty Tarantala. I hate to see him, and then I still feel shivery when I can't see him, for I know he's about somewhere, but as we can slay a Tarantala with a boot, and Uncles must have Christian burial, it's no use thinking of murder, only I wish my revered grandparents on the maternal side had chosen a different brother for mother, and I verily believe Uncle ate that sheep, for I saw his boy drying a skin the last time I passed the cottage. Eggs have been very scarce, too, lately. I must have a talk to

the hens, only, poor dears, they can't tell me much."

"If I catch that boy Jacob at any thieving tricks I'll sjambok the life out of him," replied Fairbain. "Well, I'm off to the lands, Gloria; if you want anything, Claas is about; he can help."

"Yes, father," Gloria replied, and she then started her household duties with a merry tune on her lips, determined to banish all thoughts of trouble until it should actually arrive, for, as she philosophically thought, "You can't kick a dog that isn't there, even if you smell him!"

When Petrus Dutoit arrived at Pietsrust, he sought out his sister at the New Hotel with all possible speed, determined that if he could possibly obtain some money from her he would be off to Johannesburg by the late train, known as the Kaffir Mail, and thus reach Johannesburg the next morning, in time to see Vancohn at his office at an early hour.

Aletta Fairbain was seated on the balcony that ran round the hotel on the first floor, and she prided herself that she was not lazy, for as well as being engaged on something that would come in handy for the sacred sitting-room, was also behaving in a manner that she imagined no Englishwoman could rival, during her forced leisure. Her ample form was encased in a bright coloured silk blouse, which was worn with a black stuff skirt. True it was about the worst cut that could have been chosen, taking into consideration the proportions of her form; also it was a crimson silk blouse, and had a collar and cuffs of imitation lace. Her dark hair was parted in the middle and plainly platted at the back, and into the plaits she had stuck two celluloid fancy pins, while a gold and pink coral brooch added to her ornaments. Her large feet, in somewhat clumsy black boots, were resting upon a footstool, and her hands, busy with a table cover for the best parlour, the material being of green rep, and the flowers she was endeavouring to embroider in silk, golden marigolds and pink roses. She had dreams that it might perhaps fetch a prize at the next agricultural show at Pietsrust, for rumour

said that there was again going to be a needlework section, and she thought with scorn of the exhibits of the previous year that had taken prizes; one having been called a bedspread, a creation of cream canvas worked with pansies and geraniums in wools and edged with crochet. As though any decent woman would ever put any needlework on a bed! Of course, the thing had been a table cover, and naught else, in her opinion, but wrongly named. Ach, she would show them what was what; and then the lemon coloured satin cushion cover with autumn leaves painted on! Well, it wasn't her fancy anyway, though it had gained the first prize. After all, there was no denying that the white brush-bags with violet ribbon work had been pretty, but just a child's work. And so her thoughts ran on, and when she paused she always thought again of her dear little Johannes, and sometimes she would suck her needle and look at the oxen in the road plodding past with their loads of farm produce, or packages from the station to be delivered to the stores, and she would listen to the calls of the drivers and wonder how the farm thrived, and which of the cows would calve next. It was the hour of sunset and she was dressed, and, as she would have called it, "all ready" for the late dinner which the hotel in Pietsrust indulged in; although it didn't seem much different from the mid-day meal, except that at night there was soup and not otherwise; but it did seem like being a real lady to put on her best silk blouse every night of her life, and she wished William could have been with her to share the glory. Yes, this was town life, and more gay than the farm. Still she reckoned she'd have had enough of it by the time Johannes was ready to leave the hospital. Now if only it had been Nachtmaal week, it would have fitted in fine. But no such luck. And so her adornment gave only half the pleasure it might otherwise have done, for at Nachtmaal, the time of the annual communion, every woman wore her best array. Mrs. Fairbain, unlike many Colonial women of the Boer type, still took a pride in her appearance, although

she had been married time enough to be, in the eyes of the Dutch community, old enough to be a grandmother, and many were the speculative thoughts as to who Gloria would marry, for the greatest interest in the Colonial Dutch is taken in their family life, and most of the women think it wrong to have small families. Mrs. Fairbain, in fact, was pitied by many for not having more than two children, and the fault was laid at the door of her husband for being an Englishman, for truly, Aletta Fairbain was fat, as a woman should be; while Gloria showed no signs of taking after her mother in this respect, and therefore was no beauty in the eyes of the Boer community.

It was during a pause in the putting in and out of the needle, and while Mrs. Fairbain was wondering if Gloria would marry at all, that her brother drove up to the hotel. She did not at once see him, as she was not expecting anyone from Clevedon for the next few days, and so did not trouble to look over the balcony when she heard a cart draw up at the entrance to the hotel. But thinking being with her a pastime of short duration, she soon decided in her own mind that Gloria must look round seriously next Nachtmaal, and not devote all her time to her father. Mrs. Fairbain then proceeded to bite off another piece of silk, and threading her needle, attacked once more a marigold of a shade more yellow than golden; and then she sighed. It was a bit lonely after all to live like a lady at an hotel. She couldn't think how Mrs. Smith, the commercial traveller's wife, who boasted she had lived at this same hotel for two years, could stand it.

Then suddenly a hand clapped her on the shoulder, and Petrus Dutoit, addressing her in Dutch, said :

“ Wel, Aletta, hoe gaat het met you ? ”

She felt more glad to see him than she otherwise would have done had he come when she was occupied with Johannes or if she had been on the farm employed with her usual duties. But now in her loneliness, her heart warmed towards him in an unusual manner, and once she had ascertained that he brought no bad news, she gave another sigh, but one of hap-

piness this time, and her fat bosom seemed to expand, and her two chins rested on each other with a contented ease, as she said once again :

“ Nee, goed danki, Petrus, I am right glad to see you, man.”

Truly Dutoit was in luck. He had caught his sister in a soft mood at the psychological moment to be squeezed for a little money, should she have any. He hoped so, as he had no wish to wait for her to get it from the Bank in the morning, which would mean he would lose a whole day and then have to stay in Johannesburg another night before he could see Vancohn.

After they had exchanged greetings, he started in an artful way to suggest that he thought the ploughing would be unsatisfactory that spring. True, there had been rains, but he doubted much if more would come. Also the gooseberry weed was something cruel on the land. Then he went on to hint that he had the chance of getting the option on a small farm not far from Clevedon, on which there had been found indications of diamond ground.

Then Aletta quickly interrupted him by saying :

“ Ach Petrus, shut up ; it's prospecting on my farm you'll be talking of next, and that's more than I will have on Clevedon. I've said it a hundred times and I say it again.”

“ Nee, nee, Aletta,” said Dutoit. “ Don't be so hasty. I tell you this, and mind it's a dead secret between you and me, it's the option on the other farm I'm after, and if you can lend me thirty pounds I can go to Johannesburg to-night and see about it, and then, don't you see, if it turns out as I think, well, I shall make a lot of money out of that bit of ground, and you will of course stand in with me, and that will help you to pay off the bond on Clevedon, and the farm be more securely yours than ever.”

“ Thirty pounds is a lot of ready money, Petrus, and the next interest not arranged for.”

“ Not ? ”

“ Well, not exactly ; you see, I've had to draw

money for Johannes and this hotel, and there's the last harvest money not been paid us yet, and won't be till after the next interest comes due, worse luck; but William, he had to sell and give this credit."

"But you have thirty pounds," said Petrus.

"Well, as it happens, yes; but there's bills to pay for things ordered for Johannes from Johannesburg."

"You have the money out of the bank?" asked Petrus, not too eagerly but slyly watching his sister.

"Yes, I have thirty-five in my under pocket. I don't trust these townspeople, there's always thieves about."

"You are quite right, Aletta, things are not what they were before the war."

"I will send and ask William, and let you know," continued Aletta. "He knows more than me, he's had learning."

"Yet he didn't learn to keep his own money," said Dutoit with a sneer.

"Well, for the matter of that, neither did you, Petrus," his sister rejoined.

"I had bad luck. Now luck is like harvests, the bad can't go on for ever, year in and year out. Aletta, here is my chance, I mean our chance, yours and mine. Let me have thirty quid, but don't say anything to William Fairbain about it."

"But I've never had a secret since I was married, Petrus. Think of that, and it's not for me to start now, and me a grandmother when Gloria marries, and she old enough to wed. William's stuck to me."

"And to your farm, Aletta; he had nothing when he married you, remember that."

"But he's worked like two white men, and the farm's as much his now as though 'twas," argued Aletta bravely.

"Maybe, but he wasn't born on the land. Africa is for those who were born there."

"I don't know, the niggers was born first, it seems to me, but white has to live, and I'm white and William's white. No, Petrus, the land is for them as have earned it."

Aletta Fairbain talked one moment in Dutch and then the next in English, and her English was ungrammatical at times, though her intentions were good, and her heart beat true, and that means everything. Her brother, finding he was on the wrong track, craftily moved his persuasions into another channel.

"Ja, Ja, Aletta, you are right, and Fairbain's a decent sort, for an Englishman he isn't bad. But if you're so struck on him, why not help him against his wish? He doesn't know everything and might be afraid of this new venture of mine, sort of jealous that I should find instead of him; so if you let me have the money, and I go and settle about the option, then it would be best that you said naught, and all the more pleasant surprise when he finds you have done this deal and really saved your farm."

"Saved my farm, Petrus; what do you mean?"

"Well, there's always the bond to remember."

"Ach, but that's nothing; the Bank won't press, the interest will be found somehow. No, if you get all you think from this deal, we might take Johannes to Europe. He's better, yes, but in Europe I have heard tell they can make the crooked straight. You see, that's where all the patent medicines come from, and the picture advertisements are that wonderful. 'Click-Clack' is a marvellous ointment that I know, so if one was on the spot and really saw them as invents these things, there's no saying what might happen to Johannes."

"That was my idea from the beginning," said Dutoit. "Only I didn't like to raise your hopes."

"Will you want quite thirty, and at once?" asked his sister.

"Ja, ja, Aletta, ach it is so little, only the price of two cows. It is nothing, and you have it so handy."

Clang! clang! rang the dinner bell, and Aletta removed her feet from the footstool.

"Petrus, go and wash your hands," she said. "I live like a lady here. Show them you know how to behave, too."

"Right; I brought a collar with me," Dutoit replied. "And, Aletta, while I smarten up, just you go and take that thirty quid out of your inside pocket. I could catch the Kaffir Mail and take you to the Bioscope first."

The Bioscope! The heart of the Boer woman beat high at the prospect. She had seen a Bioscope twice, once in the company of her husband, and once at the Vuurklip, when she and Gloria had driven over there at the invitation of the Manager, who had persuaded the Recreation Club to hire the show from Pietsrust on a Sunday night, to amuse, not only the men, but also the women and children on the Vuurklip mine.

Yes, she would like to go to the Bioscope, and how glad she was that she was already dressed in her best silk blouse. Oh, yes, she felt rich already, and the jump from the sadness of loneliness to the joy of companionship was so great that when they sat down to dinner she offered no objection to her brother when he ordered a bottle of Cape burgundy. True, she rarely drank wine, and much preferred coffee, but still it was a festive occasion, and the health of his new project must be drunk, though she was more than willing that he should do the drinking, and before the dinner was over she had handed him a pocket handkerchief containing thirty pounds in notes and gold.

Yet in her simple heart she beamed with gratitude when he insisted on paying the entrance fees to the Bioscope show. It was but four shillings for the two of them, and his only expense that evening, for, of course, both the dinner and the wine would be entered on the hotel book to his sister's account.

Petrus Dutoit caught the Kaffir Mail, and he licked his lips with pleasure as he thought how "slim" he had been to borrow from his sister the very money he needed, that would enable him, perhaps, to rob her of her farm.

Yes, he was a very clever man, was Petrus Dutoit, but somewhere in the heavens there existed a Being even more clever than he—his Maker.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next morning as soon as it seemed at all likely that Mr. Abraham Vancohn should have reached his office, Petrus Dutoit telephoned to ask if he might have an appointment, giving no name, except that he was a farmer from the Luilekkerland district, and stating that it was on a matter of urgent business, and he received permission to call at eleven o'clock.

When he was ushered into the office of Vancohn he found that worthy gentleman carefully handling one of van Wouw's fine statuettes of a Bushman. He at once recognised Dutoit, and gently placing the statue on the writing table before him, observed:

"Ah, so it is you. What do you think of this? Art is now the vogue in Johannesburg, and I am undecided whether I will become a patron of statuary or a collector of coloured prints. My worthy Boer friend, what do you advise?"

"Ach, what sells for the most and eats the least," Dutoit replied.

"Admirable, admirable. Now, pray be seated, and tell me how best I can serve you. We have sometimes discussed the weather at the Vuurklip and politics at Pietsrust, if I remember rightly, and what now?"

"I have a diamond mine for sale."

"A diamond mine? Do not speak so loudly. It is not at all necessary, although vastly interesting. And this mine is where?"

"It is a farm I've had my eyes on."

"Yours?"

"No, worse luck."

"Come, you may completely trust me; surely you know that. You are, I believe, a near neighbour to

the Vuurklip; you live in the Luilekkerland district. Have a cigar, will you? "

"Ja dankie."

"Now we can talk quite comfortably. Don't think me unsociable, but I do not smoke so early in the morning; you are a gentleman at large, I have my work to do. You Boer gentlemen can better afford to take life easily, eh? " and Vancohn commenced to smooth the long, white, thin fingers of his left hand with a pencil which he delicately held in his right. He seemed in no hurry, and watched the Boer light up his cigar, as though courteously awaiting his pleasure.

"Don't know about ease," grunted Dutoit, taking a good pull at the cigar, "I've worked blooming hard lately, and I mean to get well paid for it."

"And so you think you have found a mine. What makes you think so my friend? "

"Carbon, garnets."

"Still, they do not constitute a mine."

"I've found a rough diamond too."

"Have you though? You don't think it was put there? "

"I found it myself."

"Still, it might have been put there. There's a lot of knavery in South Africa, my friend, and mines have been salted before now, and if a gold mine, why not a diamond? And, by the way, it is a little dangerous to have a rough diamond on you. But, of course, you only say you have it. You could not produce it for me to see, I dare swear."

"Ach, but I could," replied Dutoit.

"And you will? " Vancohn ceased to play with his fingers, but leaned a little forward and looked at the Boer seated so near him on the other side of the writing table.

"That depends," said Dutoit cautiously, a crafty smile crossing his face as a slug might creep across a dung hill.

"Why did you come to me? " asked Vancohn, withdrawing the gaze of his small yet deep-set eyes,

and appearing once more to be interested in the small statuette.

"Because you are Abraham Vancohn, solicitor, and a Director of the Vuurklip mine——"

"And you think that?"

"You might persuade your company to buy the farm," Dutoit replied, removing the cigar from his mouth, and lolling back in his chair. He stuck out his great flat ugly feet, resting on the edges of the heels of his clumsy brown boots in a manner not only quite at home, but familiar, in a way Vancohn resented; yet he was too clever to show his resentment, for he realised that he might have much to gain if he could only get this lout of a Boer to talk.

"You did a very wise thing in coming to me, very wise," he said, and turning the gaze of his steel-coloured eyes upon the Boer, he continued gravely: "You might have gone to some unscrupulous dog who would have used your information to his advantage and not to yours. Now, if only what you say is correct, we might both profit by this discovery of yours, and profit largely, but it is no use going on in the dark. I can say nothing without seeing proofs. I have, as you know, great influence with my company, but I cannot well put a moonbeam before them and say it is a silver mine; neither can I talk of diamonds, having seen nothing. What proofs have you, and where is this farm? You have the prospecting option I take it?"

Petrus Dutoit saw fit to ignore the latter part of Vancohn's questioning, and placing his cigar on the ledge of the ash tray, he, without speaking, proceeded to take from his pocket the piece of paper holding the garnets and carbons he had found on Clevedon Farm, and handed them to Vancohn, who pursed up his lips and tried to look professionally wise. He delicately picked up a carbon and then a garnet, his thin fingers looking almost transparent as he held them up to the light; then he observed:

"Um, yes; they certainly are carbons and garnets, but still they might have been given you by someone

on the Vuurklip mine. What about the rough diamond you said you had found? By the way, I suppose you are well aware that it is illegal to have a rough diamond on you without the necessary permit, or a very good explanation on your part to prove you have not been playing the little game of I.D.B.,* which might get you seven years hard?"

"Ach ja, man, I know all about that, but no one knows that I have it except you."

"And you trust me; that is confidence well placed in a measure. Still, I also must satisfy myself as to where you really obtained it." Mr. Vancohn looked important.

"Ach, man, you are a Jo'burg lawyer, and there are very few of your persuasion who have such clean fingers that they can ride the high horse at any such business proposition. I didn't steal the stone, neither did I buy it. Now, what do you say?"

"How do you expect to benefit, and to what extent? Also this may be merely an alluvial deposit, or if you got it near a river simply a poor wash not worth looking at. I must know a great deal more before I could lay any proposition before my Company; also, what should I get for my trouble? You must lay more cards on the table. What is your game; the farm is not yours?"

"Nee, I thought it might be possible to buy it, and sell it again to the Vuurklip Co."

"And your idea of price is what?"

"I don't know yet. Can't say the extent of the claims or nothing."

"It has not in fact been properly prospected?"

"Nee."

"And you have permission to do so?"

"Nee, it must be secret."

"And secretly you have searched and found these samples?"

"Ja."

"You have brains, my friend. Show me the diamond," and Vancohn held out his hand.

* I.D.B. illegal diamond buying.

Dutoit took from his waistcoat pocket a small envelope, inside of which was some thin paper, and in that lay a rough diamond, a stone weighing about two and a half carat.

Vancohn took it between his thumb and first finger, and fingered it in a way men acquire when they often touch diamonds, gently moving it as one may toy with a crumb of bread; for the surface of a diamond if rough or smooth has a peculiar oily feeling, and holds a certain undefinable fascination.

"You have had it weighed?" he asked.

"Nee," replied Dutoit.

"And, needless to say, you have not had it registered?"

"Nee."

"The law on this point, my friend, is that as soon as a diamond is picked up, no matter where, it must be taken to the nearest magistrate and registered."

"I brought it to you instead," said Dutoit, and smiled into the thin lawyer's face as he dexterously laid his big brown palm on the delicate hand of Vancohn, and taking the diamond away from him, replaced it once more in its paper covering.

"I will help you on one condition," said Vancohn. "If I assist you to purchase this farm, I must have eighty per cent. of the purchase money we receive from my Company, if they purchase it."

"No damn fear," said Dutoit coarsely.

"Well then, friend Boer, I fear we shall not do business. You come to me to sell that which is not yet yours; you tell me a yarn and show me stones; and yet I know nothing actually of where you got them. You are a clever fellow, but how do I know that you have the slightest chance of ever buying this farm, or that you even know the owners?"

"Know the owners! Well, that's cool considering it's my sister's farm." Dutoit blurted this out snappily, his anger rising, and the cool, calm, pale lawyer suppressed his inclination to smile, for he had found out just the information he required.

"And Mrs. Fairbain knows nothing?" he asked gently.

"Nothing; nor any of the family. They are a parcel of fools. My sister clings to the land, and has refused to allow any prospecting."

"Therefore if you induce her to sell, she will sell very cheaply, just the price in fact of the farm as a farm."

"Ja, but it won't be easy to make her sell. I'm hoping for a bad harvest next year, and the cattle might come to grief sooner than that, and then the interest would be difficult to find."

"The interest? So there is a bond on the farm."

"Ja."

"So much the better. Well, things will doubtless shape out; they usually do; but the chief thing is to make further investigations, and that quite secretly, for the richer the find, the better price we could get from the Vuurklip Co. Have you tried drilling?"

"Nee."

"A drill costs money."

"Ja."

"And you have none of course."

"Nee."

"Well, if I am to assist you at all, terms must be settled now and at once. You must not forget the capital would have to be raised to purchase this farm from your sister."

"That would be your business." The tone of Dutoit was impudent, but Vancohn was far too clever a man to show any resentment. He realised it was to be a case of knave against knave, and success to the one who kept calm and had the least scruples.

"Yes, my friend Dutoit, it seems I have to find the money, and do all the really important work; therefore eighty per cent. of the purchase price is a generous offer on my part. That leaves you twenty per cent. Come, let us settle this question, and then I have another suggestion to make that will help you considerably, and prove in a short time how rich the land is."

"No. Eighty per cent. for me," said Dutoit, putting the finished stump of his cigar into the ink-pot and cocking his hat, which he had failed to remove, at a rakish angle.

"Then I won't keep you any longer," observed Vancohn in a careless tone, and he proceeded to take up a bundle of papers, docketed and tied with pink tape.

"Of course," he continued, "if you go elsewhere you will find innumerable difficulties. Money is tight in Johannesburg just now; the few preliminary thousands will be hard for you to find; also secrecy is a virtue few men possess. Be careful or you will find yourself in queer street, my friend. If your sister, for instance, heard what you were up to, you would no longer enjoy such comfortable quarters on her farm, but that is a minor detail compared to what else you would lose. However, if you are blind to your own interests that is your look-out," and Mr. Vancohn scanned with apparent interest a document he had selected and drawn from the bundle.

"How's my sister to know? I'd rip up the throat of anyone who dared to"

"Hanging wouldn't make you rich." Again Mr. Vancohn pursed his lips, and raised his hand as though to sound the gong on his table, observing:

"Your mind is made up? Excuse me, but I have other work. If we are not going to do a deal, I can afford no longer time."

"But eighty per cent. is a darned sight too much."

Vancohn did not sound the gong, but instead pushed the legal documents from him, and leaning forward looked steadily at Petrus Dutoit as he said:

"You are throwing away the chance of your life perhaps. Why did you come to me; because you know I have the power to do that which might be required. You had the sense to come, so why go? and you no further advanced in your scheme than when you came?"

"But eighty per cent."

"I shall have to raise money and pay heavily for

it—eighty per cent. is only just. It's my price, that or nothing."

"Now, if you wanted sixty or seventy per cent., it would be different, but eighty!"

"Well, my friend, if it's the 'e' that sticks in your gizzard, let's make it an 's.' I'll be generous and meet you half way, and say seventy-five; now say it's done and get on."

"Very well. You lawyers are hard nuts to crack," said Petrus Dutoit grudgingly.

"But we are useful, very useful; come, we will shake hands on it," and Vancohn held out his slender white hand. He had something of the artistic temperament in his nature, as so many Jews have, and he sensitively shrank a little as his hand was held for the short space of a few seconds by the large clammy paw of the uncouth-looking Boer. Vancohn had next to his love of money an appreciation of beauty, and was sensitive to sight, sound and touch, but possessed of no scruples where honour or honesty was concerned.

"Have another cigar," he said, and proffered a half-filled box.

"These are jolly good," said Dutoit, taking one. "Cost a tidy penny I should say."

"Well, yes, but I got them cheap from clients."

"There's no flies on you," said Dutoit with admiration.

"And very few on you, my friend. But now about the drill. You must get a Halford drill. The drill is very small, and with it you can make holes to the depth of twenty or thirty feet, and bring up the samples of ground gone through, without the necessity of having to make pits or shafts, which at once would be detected. You understand?"

"Ja, but who is to pay for the drill?"

"Oh, I will pay for the drill right enough if you will do the working of it. The cost is about fifteen pounds."

"Then there's my fare from Pietsrust here and back and other expenses."

"The drill is all that concerns me at present, but

to show you I am prepared to deal generously with you, I'll make it twenty pounds. That will leave enough over after paying for the drill, to pay for your railway ticket and a bit extra. You are returning at once I hope?"

"Ja. I'll be off to-night if I can get the drill to-day."

"Go to Tarry's, you will be pretty certain to get it there."

"And I'll take the cash in notes I think," said Dutoit.

"I think not," said Vancohn, with a slight grin. "When I pay cash I pay coin," and unlocking a drawer in his desk he proceeded to count out twenty pounds in sovereigns.

The eyes of the Boer watched that gold as though it was something of delight to his senses, and his clammy hands took a keen delight in dropping the coins one by one into a linen bag he carried. Having counted and dropped all the gold into the bag, he made the top secure with a dirty piece of string, and placed it in an inside pocket. Vancohn watching him the while, an air almost of indifference on his face, and yet his eyes busily reading the character of the man before him, he guessed, and guessed rightly, that Petrus Dutoit was not the man to go on the spree with that money. No, it represented too well the means of obtaining more. Once again they shook hands, and then Dutoit set his hat more firmly on his head, placed the cigar just received in another pocket, declining the offer of an envelope as cigar case, and took his departure.

When he had gone some distance from the building he suddenly remembered that, after all, Vancohn had given him nothing in writing, but had obtained all the information that he, Dutoit, had, thereby getting Dutoit more or less into his power; also, since all the purchase money would be likely to pass through the hands of Vancohn, he, being solicitor to the Vuurklip Company, how was he, Dutoit, to be certain of getting even his twenty-five per cent? "That lawyer is a

damned sight cleverer than I am," he said to himself, as he looked at his reflection in the shop window in front of which he had passed. "Petrus, you're just a calf compared to him," and then he turned and looked back at the sky scraper wherein the office of Vancohn was situated, and an ugly look came into his face as he muttered:

"Ik zal een plan maak." (I will make a scheme.)

CHAPTER IX

SUNDAY! What a special charm there is in that word, even though the day occurs the same as elsewhere, in the land of almost perpetual sunshine. Sunday! There is no man or woman who does not in some way observe it in a manner to denote it from other days.

At Clevedon it was always arranged that no unnecessary work should be done on Sunday, only the cows milked and the horses watered, and such things seen to that meant, not only loss but suffering also, if left undone; breakfast too was a little later on a Sunday morning, and Gloria always fried some little sweet cakes and had them served hot; William Fairbain appeared at breakfast in a clean shirt, and later in the morning put on a collar, and Gloria, after the morning household work was seen to, would dress herself up in something fresh and sweet, and would tie up her russet locks with a piece of pretty ribbon. Mrs. Fairbain always wore a black dress on a Sunday, for black is universally loved by the South African Boer woman, both in time of mourning and in time of joy: it is usually a fearsome gown long at the back and short in the front, and hanging full at wrong angles, catching up the dust at the tails, and only in its newest stages looking at all presentable. Still, Mrs. Fairbain had better taste than many of her class, and so her dress was not too short in the front, and not too long at the back, and always enlivened by a frill of crochet at the neck, or a cheap lace collar; on special days she wore a bright-coloured silk blouse, but rarely on Sundays. The first Sunday that Mrs. Fairbain and little Johannes spent at Clevedon after their stay at Pietsrust was indeed a day of happiness

for them all; they had arrived on the Saturday evening, and Gloria had worked very hard so that all should be shipshape in the house for her mother; she specially wanted her mother to be pleased, and she blushed to herself when she remembered why.

For young Louis Martino had not forgotten that he had a motor bicycle, or that he knew the road to the farm, and several times of an evening during the three weeks of her mother's absence, he had motored over and brought her a magazine from the Vuurklip Mine library, or a few chocolates; never staying very long, and seeing her only in her father's presence. But on his last visit, just three days before Mrs. Fairbain and Johannes were expected, Mr. Fairbain had asked him to come to tea on the following Sunday, and needless to say he had accepted. That he should be coming to them for a meal seemed to Gloria something wonderful, and at her father's invitation too, her father, who was not wont to invite young men to the house, though he made all welcome who came of their own accord.

True daughter of Eve, Gloria had wished to look her very best on this eventful Sunday, and great was the care she gave to the ironing out of her pale pink frock; true, it had been in the wash several times already, but Gloria liked it all the better for that, the contact with soap and water having taken away its originally somewhat bright shade, and reduced it to the delicate tint that looked so well with the freshness of her skin and the warm tints of her hair. Her mother had brought her a little set of dainty muslin cuffs and collar as a souvenir from Pietsrust, and, of course, they must be worn straight away and not be "put by for Nachtmal," as Mrs. Fairbain had advised. Slyly, too, she had put three eggs into the plum cake and frosted it with sugar, giving as an excuse that of course she must make a festival cake to welcome back little Johannes, who seemed already so much better for the new treatment, and talked about the great things he would do when he really had got as strong as other boys, for hope was in his little heart

and less pain in his limbs, although his coat still hung in the old, old way over his little hunched back, and his shoulders were very near his ears.

No one spoke yet of the spent money. It was Sunday, and there was always the week to come, to talk over the disagreeable realities of life in.

Mrs. Fairbain was very glad to be back on the farm with no regrets for the idle weeks when she had lived "as a lady born." It was to her much more interesting to worship again her household gods and take the reins of management. Petrus Dutoit had returned with her, and no one except herself knew of his journey to Johannesburg. She longed to tell her husband everything, and at once, but her brother had again advised her not to do so yet, and tried to comfort her for her unwilling deceitfulness by saying, "It isn't as though he was one of us born on the land; better say naught till I can pay back the thirty pounds and back numbers and interest to it."

So much had been borrowed by him before, with no thought of paying back, that Mrs. Fairbain began to imagine that at last he really was beginning to seriously remember that he owed them money.

On that special Sunday even the boys seemed to be on their best behaviour, and turned up at the farm ready to milk the cows in good time, without asking for passes to go to some distant church, an excuse which usually meant a jaunt to another kraal for a beer drink. Gloria began to think as the morning advanced that really such a Sunday was too good to last. The two native girls, too, they worked better than usual, and did not run away home until the last plate from the mid-day dinner had been washed and wiped and all put tidy; then hand in hand they tripped away to the little mud hut where they lived with their brother Claas and his wife and several children. Here Claas kept his own cow and some fowls, and one sometimes wondered which slept inside the hut and which out, though to be sure it was quite a good hut, with two rooms and a lean-to shed, and a bit of wire-work round a little piece of land, and a

baking oven outside the hut and a general air of prosperity not to be despised, for Claas had worked long on this farm, and was a valued servant; in addition to which his parents had lived on the farm before him and he had been born here.

There are days when the hours sing and the sun seems made for oneself alone, and music is in each sound, no matter what. Life is alive with radiating happiness, youth is coming into its own kingdom, and age and the winter and decay and sorrow, they are not tangible things, but shadows never thought of, and if seen as specks on the horizon, take to themselves colours of brightness, and change from darkness into light, from dullness to gaiety; nothing in God's universe seems capable of turning laughter into tears, and men and women are as the angels, only capable of love.

"Gloria, come Nachtmaal, you must find a husband," said her mother, as she watched her standing by the doorway of the stoep, her bright eyes looking across the veld, her hands clasped to her bosom as though to keep back the flood of happiness that seemed ready to spring from her very being.

"Nee, nee, mother," said Gloria, with a quiet blush, becoming conscious of herself. "I want no husband. Why, I am happy, so happy now; don't talk of such a thing. Besides, if I am ever to marry, I would not like a Nachtmaal choosing."

"And why not? All the young farmers look round then. One gets a chance of being seen, and a dance on a Monday after a Lord's supper Sunday is a rare place for mating, and many's the 'upsitting' comes of it soon after."

"I think love should be accidental," said Gloria shyly, turning away from the stoep door and pretending to be very interested in smoothing her father's hair. He happened to be seated quite near her, contentedly smoking his pipe.

"Gloria is all right here, and won't be going and getting married for many a year to come," said William Fairbain, "Nachtmaal or no Nachtmaal."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Fairbain mysteriously, and closed her eyes for her regular after dinner Sunday sleep in the rush chair on the stoep. Little Johannes was lying down within the house, and Gloria felt that only she was really alive on that sunny spring afternoon; she and the Kaffirs who laughed in the distance, they were alive and happy too; yes, and the bees who kissed the flowers, and the doves in the peach orchard, how they answered each other with an ever ready cooing reply, that was love, a song for two, and each word like music.

Yet how did Gloria know that? Why did Gloria think that?

"I must walk away from my thoughts, for I do not understand them at all to-day," she said to herself, and softly stepped within the house, and collecting a shady hat and an old sunshade, she started off to walk down the river, feeling she must be near something moving, something with which her thoughts might flow somewhere alone, where her glow of life could burn within her heart unchecked, and she could enjoy the beauty of her youth unseen and unashamed.

There is something more than beauty in a moving river, more than utility in the wealth of its water, more than romantic the song it sings, for the river is symbolical, it represents life in all its stages, youth with its eagerness rushing onward knowing not where, maturity with its faithfulness feeding the earth in its passing; and age, yes, for here and there dead leaves even in springtime are seen, and gnarled trunk of ending tree and withered branch of sapless bush. Fortunately young eyes demand the freshness of youth and find it; they fail to see, even as they look at spring, the ravages of winter; they are so selfish, the young, in their demand for happiness, and delightful is that same selfishness, it has a bloom of beauty on it. All youth is egotistical; it is the growth of the universe, and the selfishness of youth is not sinful as the egotism of age.

In youth too one feels so intensely that one cannot

define one's emotions; they rush through one's blood and play riot with one's brain. Reason and doctrine, they are for those who have finished with life's first and greatest charm, which is experience of life and inexperience of living.

Down to the river Gloria wandered; the afternoon sun was hot and the veld seemed to give forth a burning heat as her feet touched the short grass. There was no shelter above, nothing between her and the great dome of blue sky save her old green sunshade. For pathways are not shaded by delicate tracery of trees out on the South African veld. Between the farm homestead and the river was a walk of some fifteen minutes extent, and not a single tree the whole way, only the short grass, with here and there an ant heap or perhaps a few of the stunted bushes that the wives of the Boers used to use to boil when making their soap, before they learned the merits of caustic soda. Gloria kept her eyes fixed on the ground as she went; her eyes felt less the glare of the sunlight so; also she had no wish to tread on a snake, for there were so many in that vicinity. Then, too, she hoped perchance to see a few veld flowers that peeped up sometimes amidst the coarse grass, diminutive wild pansies growing very near to the earth, or a rose-coloured flower like a convolvulus, or maybe a pretty green lizard would dart across the pathway. She loved all living things except snakes, and these she always told herself were the spirits of wicked people who had died and could not rest in their graves, because their relations would not forgive them; she pitied them in a way too, for she had a theory that they must be killed, for only by second death could they get through purgatory. Doubtless the elders of the Reformed Dutch Church would have been shocked at Gloria's ideas, but they were the outcome of childish dreams, mixed with the legends of native lore told to her in her childhood by an old native.

The river was neither broad nor deep, but it held water all the year round, and on its bank grew mimosa thorn trees and bushes, and to Gloria it seemed an

enchanted place, for a few little birds chirped there and the water sang as it splashed over stones and pebbles and came from one knew not where, and moved one knew not how; it was all alive this water, not still and silent and dead as the water in the dams; no, this little river led a romantic life, one of mystery and adventure.

No mossy bank, as the English know of mossy banks, found Gloria, but a ledge near the water where the silver stream flowed at her feet over stones, and around her was hard short grass, and above her trees of stunted thorny growth, yet beautiful in their way as a contrast to the treeless veld around. Trees of a larger growth hung twisted athwart the stream, as though the water in its flowing down had washed away the earth and displayed the secrets of their roots, for exposed masses of brown, hard, curled wooden tendrils showed above the water in a crude manner, naked as so much in South Africa is naked.

Gloria had seen no other land, knew nothing of the soft loveliness of brook or stream, singing their way over flower bed and fern-girt basin; this river was to her nature in its sweetest form. True, the river at Pietsrust ran on grander lines, but this spot seemed so much her very own; she was jealous for the beauty of its small simplicity, careful of its reputation, as though other or greater contrasts or attractions might prove harmful, loving this stream as a mother might her child, eager to note each additional charm, and indifferent as to whether it surpassed the rest of the world in reality, that it did, in her eyes, being enough.

"Tell me, stream, why am I so happy to-day?" she cried gently; then listened as though fearful lest the wind should carry her words, and the cattle grazing on the veld on the opposite side of the bank toss their heads in scorn at her remarks. When one is very happy one fears almost the echo of one's thoughts, for happiness is of so frail, so fairylike a nature, and gets so easily bruised, so quickly repulsed. The stream gave no answer, and yet Gloria seemed satis-

fied, for in perfect communion one feels sympathy; it has no need to be expressed in words.

It was early afternoon, and how long Gloria dreamed there her daydreams she did not know. She loved the stream and her reverie by it, and yet the thought crept through the blue mist of satisfaction that perhaps she ought not to have come, for was not company expected at home for tea? Company being Louis Martino, of whose promised visit she had been too shy to tell her mother, yet why she should be so shy she had no idea.

Ought she to have remained at home to welcome him? Oh no, no, she could not have done so. The stream had called her, not away from him actually, yet to him in thought, though in appearance the reverse.

Then the sound of a motor bicycle, thumping out its lurid unpleasant vehemence in the distance, told her that Martino must have arrived at the farm. Well, her father and little Johannes were there to welcome him, and her mother would awake from her nap perhaps and help to entertain him, and it wanted a full hour and a half to teatime, and surely it did not matter very much that she, Gloria, should be absent? She did not want to appear too eager to see him, and in the eyes of her family she would have hated to seem at all impressed. Surely by the time she joined the family party her heart would have ceased to beat so violently and her cheeks have cooled; how rapidly they had flushed at the sound of that horrid motor bike, and why? Gloria had half risen from her seat on the hard veld grass and stones, and now she resumed her position and tried to turn her attention to the stream.

But it was no use trying, her thoughts were at the farm, her imagination picturing the party there. Would Mr. Martino be surprised at her absence, or grieved? Would he enquire immediately about her, and then sit and smoke with her father and discuss politics, or tell a story to Johannes? Was he good at telling stories, she wondered? For Johannes was

certain to levy this toll of all callers on a Sunday, should he chance to have awakened from his after-dinner sleep. So Gloria thought on, her eyes fixed on the stream, her head turned away from the rise in the veld beyond which lay the homestead, and then, just as she was beginning to think that she must indeed return home, for not only politeness sake, but the exigencies of the tea-table demanded it, when she heard a footfall behind her, the hard veld grass and twigs of low lying bushes gave forth a sound of crushing disturbance, and a voice behind her said :

“ Good afternoon, Miss Fairbain. I heard that you had gone for a walk, and I felt certain that I should find you by the river.”

Gloria sprang up. After all, it seemed more natural to hear his voice than she had thought possible, and the quietness of his tone seemed to reproach the turbulent emotions that had possessed her that day. His smile was so open and frank, he looked so boyishly glad to see her as he stood, his slouch felt hat in his left hand, as he held out the other towards her.

“ Why should you think I must come here ? ” she asked as they shook hands, and she was astonished at her own power to smile up into his face, as though it was the most natural thing in the world that they two should be here together by the stream, with the great blue dome of heaven above them, and the golden sunshine, like a wealth of light and warmth, all round.

“ Because it is the prettiest spot in the district, and I knew that you must love beauty because, well, you know, because you are beautiful.”

“ Oh, no, really I am not. Come see how far you can throw a stone, and how big a splash it will make.”

“ I don't think you really want me to throw stones.”

“ Why ? ” Gloria knew that she did not, but she had made the suggestion in order to cover her nervous appreciation of the compliment he had paid her, and she thought how well he seemed to know her when he replied :

“ Why ? Oh, because throwing stones would dis-

turb the peace of the place, and that is why you came here. It was for your Sunday rest. Now, if you will sit down again on that hard but apparently comfortable ledge, I will stay with you a few minutes if I may; tante Aletta said tea would not be ready yet."

"Then mother was awake?"

"Yes."

"And Johannes?"

"I don't know. I didn't see him. I asked after you, and said I would come and find you and then bring you back to tea. You didn't come out to avoid me, did you?"

"Oh, no, of course not. I—I just came because I wanted to come. Yes, you may sit there if you like, but not for long; mother will be expecting me."

"You look like a pale pink flower in that frock you are wearing. It is pink, isn't it? and yet it doesn't look like any pink I've ever seen before."

"No? Well, you see, it's been washed very often. I always think pink should be worn by a mermaid, and well soaked in water before it is woven into material for an ordinary mortal to wear."

"Do you believe in mermaids?"

"Yes, though, would you believe it, I have never seen the sea. I wonder if it would frighten me. It seems, by descriptions and what one can tell from pictures, to be so large and strong I almost think I should dread to live near it, for fear it would spread in the night and wash everyone away. I can't swim you know."

"But you can do many more useful things; you don't want to know how to manage a boat when you live miles inland."

"Oh, but we have a boat here on the upper part of the stream. Farmer Marteens' children borrowed it to-day; they wanted to go about a mile higher up on the other side to see the funeral of a little child. It really was quaint, yet rather horrid too; Mary Marteens came and asked permission to use the boat, because she said the baby was to be buried at three o'clock this afternoon, and her mother had said she

might go, as she did like her children to enjoy themselves on a Sunday afternoon!"

"A gruesome sort of enjoyment certainly. Still, I suppose any change means amusement for some people. Do you find farm-life lonely, Gloria? May I call you Gloria? You don't mind, do you?"

"No, no; not at all. Somehow it sounds natural and nice when you say it."

"I am glad."

Gloria looked hurriedly away from the earnest gaze in the gentle brown eyes of Louis Martino. She began to feel again the beating of her heart, and a strange shy happiness. What was there in those brown eyes that seemed to appeal to her? She did not stay to answer the question in her mind, but said:

"I lonely at the farm? How could I be? I have never known any life save farm life, except when I was away at school, and how glad I was to return home. I liked learning, yes, only it made me feel so ignorant, while at home everyone thinks me quite wise. Then everyone loves me too, and I love everyone, except, of course, Oom Petrus. Think what a wonderful man father is, and mother and little Johannes—how could I be lonely?"

"No, I am afraid you are too happy," and Louis Martino sighed.

"But surely you would not wish me to be miserable?" asked Gloria.

"No, not quite that, only I wish you had room in your thoughts for, well, for someone else who might love you."

Gloria did not reply; she was so busy poking the end of her now folded sunshade under the root of a bush growing near. Such usage would not add to the length of life or durability of the parasol, but Gloria at that moment felt the need of occupation.

"Do you think you might get fond of a chap?" The words were commonplace, perhaps, but Louis Martino was not the kind of man who could think or talk in pictures when he was in dead earnest.

"I don't know, I—I haven't thought about it; of

course, I might." Gloria wanted to be quite truthful, and so the last few words were a salve to her conscience, for, of course, she really had thought about it in a roundabout sort of way, as every girl thinks of romance or dreams of a possible lover in the misty realms of some-day-perhaps.

"Do you think you could like me?"

"I—think—I do like you."

"Gloria!" The word was surely a benediction, so full of fervour was it said, and Martino stretched forth his hand and covered the hand of Gloria, and so firmly gripped as it had been on the parasol, still its hold relaxed and hand in hand the man and maiden sat.

"Won't you look up at me, Gloria?" he asked. He felt the light and happiness on his own face. He wanted her to see its glow, but Gloria seemed to have very heavy eyelids just then, the thick long lashes appeared to hide her eyes, as though to shelter them from the fire she had lighted in the man's face.

Then she looked up, and that first glance between them, how sacred it was, fearful of all the life that might lie for them ahead, yet full of love to meet the future, let it come pale with sorrow, or fierce with strife, or crowned with happiness.

"I am so happy I could cry," said Louis Martino after a pause. "Do you think I am very foolish, Gloria?"

"No, indeed," said she. "I know that feeling too; it's like the loveliness of sunset, it is almost too much to understand. Oh, but Louis, shall I call you Louis?"

"Of course, you dear."

"Well, Louis, this day has been all through, like, well, like lots of Sundays made into one, for everything and everybody has seemed to sing. I don't believe I could be unhappy if I tried, and I couldn't be cross; no, I verily believe I would not try to kill even a snake if he popped up his head just now."

"Well, I should," laughed Martino, glad that Gloria should have hit upon such a topic. It was a

relief to his pent up feelings to come down to earth a little from the skies of accepted love.

Gloria had had her day of dreams, and now, in the fulfilment, she was first timid and then brave. She saw how affected the man by her side seemed, she noticed the moisture in his eyes and how his hands trembled a little, and her womanly feeling of always having to think for others came to her aid then, and she said gently :

"Don't feel it too much. I am only a little nobody you know, and I am glad you are glad that I do care, but don't feel it too much, happiness must not hurt."

"No, you are right, Gloria, and think of it, we have so many years to be happy in, isn't it grand?"

"Yes, and Louis, I think we ought to go home now, you know. You and I are very happy here, but—well—the others will want their tea. Doesn't that sound prosaic?"

Gloria rose from her seat on the ledge of veld grass and stone, and Martino, having assisted her, paused, retaining his hold of her hand.

"May I kiss you once, Gloria?" he asked. "Just to seal it, you know, for though I haven't said in so many words that I want you to marry me, that is what I mean of course."

"Of course," echoed Gloria, and for a brief moment their lips met in a shy kiss, none the less true because it was asked for with reverence and yielded with modesty.

CHAPTER X

THERE are people in this world, whom for the sake of relationship we must pretend to like, even though our loathing is perhaps all the greater because of the obligations of that same relationship, and when we dislike people we shrink from their peering too deeply into our sorrows, or taking the bloom off our joys by too close an acquaintanceship with them. This was the state of affairs in the Fairbain family. Oom Petrus was accepted, he had to be accepted, as an uncle, and accorded free meals, free house, in fact the freedom of the farm, but there was always a shadow between the accepted favours and the true freedom of the heart of the farm, which was the love, the confidence, and the respect of those who dwelt there; even Aletta Fairbain, his sister, at times mistrusted him, and often the claims of relationship rasped a bit, and the sisterly affection became a duty and not a pleasure.

And so when Louis Martino had a talk with "father," and Gloria confided a little, a very little, in "mother," it was speedily arranged by universal consent that for the present Uncle Petrus need not be told anything, or any other members of the family, in fact; for Louis Martino, although holding a good post and likely to continue in regular employment, was hoping to get a rise in his salary soon, and thought that when he had settled that point, then it would be time enough to let the neighbours know that Gloria and he were engaged. Even little Johannes was spared the news, for to him the bare thought of losing his dear Gloria in a year's time might have meant a return of his weakness, or a recurrence of the neuralgic spinal trouble from which he suffered. So a sweet secret remained between four people, and the lovers fondly imagined that no one of the world out-

side their magic circle would guess of the reason of the light that shone in the eyes of the man and the maid.

Petrus Dutoit begrudged anyone happiness, and certainly was envious of all success. He was a selfish man, and to him it seemed therefore that the world had treated him badly. However, the love affairs of his niece interested him very little, and as for Louis Martino, he had no dealings with him; they, in fact, had nothing in common and rarely crossed each other's pathways. Dutoit had other fish to fry. He was out after a big thing, and he thought about the matter and brooded over what he might have done openly, had only this farm fallen to his share of the family spoil, until he convinced himself that, after all, the farm should have been his, and therefore he was fully justified in getting what he could out of it, and even if he was not justified, well, a man must live and get all he can while he can and how he can.

Having bought the drill recommended to him by Vancohn, he set to work at night secretly to try it; he would wait until the last light at the homestead was extinguished and he felt certain that all the Fairbain family had retired for the night; and then stealthily he would creep forth, and walking always in the shadow when possible, even if he had to go some way out of the direction he had intended, he thus strove to hide himself, even from any natives who might be abroad and recognise him, but beer drinks were not frequent in that neighbourhood, and the cattle was usually driven away to the veld on the other side of the farm before sunset, so that the night seemed his and his alone.

The drill was easily carried, being made in separate pieces, each of which could be screwed on to the other as required, the top piece having a small handle and the bottom being in the form of a hollow corkscrew.

Dutoit soon found that it was very easily worked, and he was surprised how well the drill brought the ground up, the earth being loosened by the screw, coming up every time the drill was drawn. At first

the ground, although yellow in colour, was so fine that he thought it could not be real yellow ground. He, however, worked away for several nights in various places, and at last succeeded in bringing up a lump of real yellow mine ground; much encouraged he worked on and soon located yellow ground over a large area.

Now it so happened that a native boy, one of the farm hands at Clevedon, lived in the small outhouse quite close to the homestead. He was a good boy as boys go, and lived at the homestead instead of with the other boys at the kraal, because being a reliable boy, Mrs. Fairbain and Gloria made use of him sometimes in the house when he was not otherwise employed. This boy, Corneels, was a bachelor, but had recently started to court a girl who lived in a kraal on the next farm, and he was hoping that soon he would have saved up money enough to buy the necessary cows with which to purchase the lady of his choice from her father. In the meantime, however, she lived with her parents, and he occasionally walked over to see her after his farm work was finished. One night, when he was returning later than usual, he was surprised to see by the light of the stars the dim outline of a man moving slowly across a part of the farm, and as he was not going in the direction of the homestead, Corneels wondered what he could possibly be up to, and thinking it might be someone after stealing the cattle, he watched him as well as he could in the quiet subtle way that a native is capable of. He saw him cross the brow of the hill and started to follow him. As he neared him he sank down on his stomach, and drew himself quickly over the grass of the veld, as a snake might wriggle along, and soon he recognised Petrus Dutoit and saw that he had begun some mysterious performance on the ground at his feet.

Shielded from view by a few milk bushes, Corneels strained his eyes to see all he could. The absence of the moon made it all the more possible for Corneels to evade discovery, while the light from the stars was

quite sufficient to show him all that Dutoit was doing. He watched him place the drill upon the ground, turn the handle, draw it up, and then eagerly look at the ground brought up. He then threw some away and put the remainder into his pocket, and after a while shouldered his drill and walked away.

Corneels waited quietly until he had gone, and then proceeded to examine the spot where he had been doing his mysterious rites. He felt the ground with his fingers, and found a little hole there and saw the loose ground lying round, that had apparently come out of the hole; this must certainly have some special value attached to it he concluded, else why should Petrus take such pains to carry some away with him? Was it a medicine that it should have this yellow tinge? or did it point to the fact that some mineral lay there? The white man had put some in his pocket; surely it behoved the native to copy him. Corneels quickly came to this conclusion, and getting up a handful he also put it into his pocket. When he stood up again he could only see the outline of Dutoit, disappearing in the direction of his cottage.

The curiosity of Corneels was thoroughly aroused. He decided that he would say nothing to anyone, but carefully hide the loose earth and come again the next night, on the off chance of finding out what further Dutoit might do.

The cottage where Dutoit lived was only a few minutes' walk distant from the homestead, and Corneels decided that after he had done his work he would loiter about and see when Dutoit came out and follow him. Would he go to the same little round hole or make another? and why did he do this after dark when it would be so much easier by daylight? Corneels had been some years on the farm, and knew well, as all the other farm hands did, that Petrus Dutoit was not a good baas; he lied, he made promises he never fulfilled, and gave many an unmerited kick when he had been drinking. A native respects a white man who beats him, if he rightly deserves it, and trusts a man who tells the truth and

fulfils his promises, be that promise one of a prize or a punishment, that promise must be kept, but the natives dislike such men as Petrus Dutoit, and Corneels felt in his mind that Baas Dutoit was after no good, though what he was up to he could not imagine. But he was determined to find out, not through any special wish to serve the Fairbain family. A native rarely takes the initiative in such a direction, and has no idea of gratitude, but curiosity is one of the most pronounced traits in the native character.

The next night, however, Corneels feared that his desire to watch would be frustrated, for just as he was preparing to quietly leave the little outside shed where he slept, he heard Mr. Fairbain calling him.

"Ja, baas, ja, baas," he replied, coming into the patch of light which emanated from the lantern Mr. Fairbain carried, the night being darker than usual.

"Oh! there you are, Corneels. It is well you have not yet gone to bed, for you must be off at once and chase the cattle away from the lands. Claas has just come in and told me that a native passing saw the oxen going through the gate. Either it is broken or has been left open. You must make it secure, Corneels, and don't come home till you have chased all the cattle away into the other camp. There can't be more than one span there, for the others are on the other side of the farm.

"Ja, baas, I go just now," Corneels replied, and accepting the loan of a lantern, he soon sped away across the veld in the direction of the lands.* The clouds were moving rapidly across the sky, and in all probability would soon disappear, leaving the sky free for the glorious stars to shed forth their light; to-night the first quarter of the moon was due.

Corneels found that only a small portion of the fencing had fallen down, and could, without difficulty, be fixed in such a way that the cattle were not likely to trespass into the lands again that night. Repairing fences and gates was one of the principle works

* Parts of the farm which are under cultivation.

on the farm to which he was used, and therefore he knew what to do and how to do it quickly, having first chased the oxen away to a considerable distance. When his work was completed he returned to the farm and shouted through Mr. Fairbain's bedroom window that all was now well; he deposited the lantern on the steps of the stoep, and then began to wonder if he was likely to see anything of Petrus Dutoit that night.

A native is a strange mixture of indolence and strength. He will loaf whenever possible and work for a far longer time than a white man could endure, if curiosity or greed prompts him, or if it is a work of pleasure. Had the work of the farm necessitated Corneels being up all night he would probably have slept and certainly have grumbled, but the impetus of curiosity renewed his energy, and he felt no fatigue of body, and not for one instant pondered in his mind as to whether he should wander about all night in search of Petrus Dutoit or not.

The secret of the yellow earth! This he must know.

Petrus Dutoit, ever wary in his movements and cautious in his methods, had kept a sharp look out at the homestead. He sat outside his cottage door in the dark and watched. He had seen the native go out across the veld with the lantern, and he did not move until he felt assured by his long absence that he had probably gone away for the night; then he started to procure further samples of the ground. Corneels was cautious also, and extinguished the light in his lantern before he returned to where he hoped to find Oom Petrus, and after a time he saw him. There he was bending down and working with what seemed to Corneels must be a magic wand of some sort. From safe cover Corneels watched, and again and again saw the slender drill brought up and the earth examined. He waited patiently; lying so near the earth, his dark body seemed but a part of the shadow, and then after Dutoit had shouldered his drill, and moved on, he went to the places where he had seen him standing, and found several holes some distance apart, and near each of them some yellow ground.

Corneels carefully took a little from each place and again secreted it on his person, certain that it must contain some value, and hoping that he would some day, soon even perhaps, solve the mystery. It is usually the case that boys from one family or one village share a secret together and call themselves brothers, but Corneels decided that he would share this secret with no one, for if the white man, who was known as the laziest man on the farm, could work thus at night, then the work must be worth while; so much and so far was the brain of the native able to gather and argue; he therefore kept his own counsel, but determined that he would find out all he could about Petrus Dutoit.

Now Petrus Dutoit became more and more pleased with his discoveries. He in fact fully made up his mind that not only was there a diamond mine on farm Clevedon, but also a very large one, and he became more and more annoyed when he remembered that he had promised Vancohn seventy-five per cent. of the purchase money, when it should be sold. The more certain he became that the mine would sell well, the more covetous did he grow, and brooded about the subject till he came to the conclusion that he must see to his plan for doing Vancohn out of that promised seventy-five per cent.

In order to accomplish this he must again visit Johannesburg, and as he did not want for the present to arouse any suspicions with regard to his visits to Johannesburg, he contrived to get an option over a small piece of utterly worthless land not far from farm Clevedon. This place, with a ramshackle shed on it, was called Langkloof, and belonged to a dirty, lazy Boer, by name Bastian Louw, who was very glad to grant the option for a few pounds, certain that it was no good, and with his tongue in his cheek at the thought of doing down Petrus Dutoit, he signed the agreement. Armed with this paper, Dutoit announced to the Fairbains that he must go to Johannesburg to try and do business with his option. His sister Aletta wished him luck, and his brother-

in-law told him he had better have stayed at home and help dip the sheep, for his idea of business meant spending and not making money. Knowing what he did, Dutoit took the sneer and heeded it not; he meant to pay out William Fairbain for having married his sister, and so to speak taken the farm, but he could afford to bide his time.

Gloria suspected that her mother must have advanced Dutoit the money, but said nothing. They were all so happy at the farm over the relief from pain that Johannes experienced, and for the moment were not pinched by the lack of money, and in that household they never met trouble half-way. Aletta Fairbain grew still fatter, and her husband hoped, as usual, that the next harvest would be a record one; while as for Gloria, she thought of the wonderful light that had entered her life, and dreamed of her lover, Louis Martino, and all her thoughts seemed to sing a glad song in unison; no one, in fact, paid much attention to what Uncle Petrus did or said, they were a happy family and not given to analysis. So Petrus Dutoit carefully packed his samples of yellow ground and hied to Johannesburg, thinking to himself that though Mr. Abraham Vancohn was cute, he, Petrus Dutoit, was cuter.

When Dutoit arrived in Johannesburg he put up at a small hotel.

He had not much difficulty in finding out the names of the directors of the Vuurklip mine, and decided that he would pay a private visit to Mr. McGreedy, the Managing Director of the Company.

Knowing that Vancohn was one of the directors, and wishing most particularly not to meet him at this juncture of events, Dutoit sent a note to Mr. McGreedy saying he would ring him up at a certain time, and he personally must answer the 'phone, as the visit he wished to pay was on private lucrative business, and he wished to see him alone. The note was signed by an initial only, and when Dutoit telephoned from a public telephone box he was speedily told by Mr. McGreedy himself that he could call in an hour.

During that hour Dutoit had an excellent lunch, and then walked down to Marshall Street until he came to the small low building where, after traversing some long passages, he found the office of Mr. McGreedy; having arrived there, however, he found he had to cool his heels quite a long time before he was admitted to the room where sat the big little Mr. McGreedy.

Now McGreedy was quite a scrap of a man as to size, and though his name sounded Scotch, his religion was certainly not of that order. How he came by such a name no one knew, but many were the tales told by those who pretended to know. Certain it was that North of the Tweed had seen very little of Mr. McGreedy. His body was not only small, but hunched together, as though his shoulders were constantly in fear of a hearty slap, and lived in dread of such an occurrence; his head was of the style known as bullet, he had very little hair and that grey, his eyes were blue-grey and just escaped a squint, and his hands were large and out of proportion to the rest of his growth; he had also a nervous habit of appearing to wash them with invisible soap. He was termed by his friends "good hearted," because he never refused a subscription if a pretty girl came with the request. His enemies called him by other epitaphs not quite so nice; chorus ladies loved him, to them he was kind; decent women loathed him, for, as they expressed it, he looked at them in an "undressing kind of way." He had a thick ugly voice, and talked with his hands as well as his mouth. Yet he was not French in gesture any more than he was Scotch by blood; his manner was neither so polished nor so persuasive as the manner of Mr. Vancohn; he belonged to the type of men who seek to command by assuming the airs of a bully, yet are careful to hide under their beds if a noise occurs during the night not to be accounted for by the cat.

Mr. McGreedy appeared to be very busy when Dutoit was ushered into his presence. He was, in fact, giving some final directions to a junior clerk,

and merely waved Dutoit to a seat, as though pressure of business was a matter of vital importance to him, and the affairs of the financial world awaited his decision with bated breath. The clerk retired, McGreedy passed one of his large hands across his brow, closed his eyes a second as though registering a mental note, and then licked his lips and sprawled forward upon his desk, as he beckoned his visitor to come nearer.

"Well, my good man, and what is it you wish to see me about?"

The clothing of Petrus Dutoit was not of the latest cut or the freshest material. He looked what he was, a Boer, who thought much of money and little of polished boots. The tone of McGreedy was a trifle patronising, for McGreedy was of the *haute finance* in Johannesburg. He had even dined upon one occasion with their Excellencies the Governor and his wife, and was on intimate terms with the latest created, or rather, selected-in-return-for-political-party-payment-baronet. McGreedy was in Society. His wife gave expensive dinners, which, after all, is the passport into South African social circles. Moreover she was as handsome as he was ugly, and his morals were conveniently on a par; so that, taking all things into consideration, McGreedy could hardly be expected to grasp Dutoit by the hand of friendship. First he must find out if he was pluckable or not.

"I think you are a Director of the Vuurklip mine?" said Dutoit, not one whit taken back by the manner of the man before him. A Boer is rarely shy; he possesses too much conceit for that.

"Yes, that is, I am the Managing Director. What do you desire?"

Without saying a word in reply, Petrus Dutoit slowly drew from his pocket a rough handkerchief, and after untying this he produced a small newspaper covering, inside of which were the samples of yellow ground; during the unpacking McGreedy regarded him with an air of assumed indifference, and even when he was permitted to finger a fairly large sample,

he looked at it carefully, yet still preserving his manner of a disinterested spectator, though he was very satisfied in his mind that that which he held was more than an ordinary indication. He, in fact, grew more and more pleased as he looked at the samples, but no movement of his face betrayed this. He was a financier by birth, by training, and by inclination.

"Where does that come from?" he asked in a casual tone.

"Ach," said Dutoit, "I will only tell you after I know what terms we can make."

But Mr. McGreedy only shrugged his hunched-up shoulders as he replied: "What do you want? After all, those samples do not mean much, they might have come from some place other than you state, and"

"I am not a rogue," Dutoit said with some anger, interrupting McGreedy; "I guarantee that this stuff comes from where I have discovered a mine and from that mine."

"You say you have discovered a mine?" A faint unbelieving smile spread itself over the clean-shaven shiny face of McGreedy.

"Ja," replied Dutoit. "And so far as I can see the mine is a large one, much larger than the Vuurklip."

"So? Where is it?"

"Nee, nee, first I must have in writing what our terms are to be; then I will tell you where it is."

"In writing? You apparently are a stern business man, my friend. Surely one may sometimes, and the more advantageously to both parties, make a little private arrangement? Verbal arrangements are quite sufficient between honourable men."

"That may be, but finance is your trade, not honour."

"And your trade is what?"

"I'm a Boer I am, a farmer."

"So I would judge from your outward appearance, but you seem to have a mind beyond that. You look at life through a legal eye, yes, positively through a legal eye. Come, how can you expect me to enter

even into the discussion of this matter without your telling me more? I wonder if you realise that I have fortunes waiting on my doorstep every day? One man brings me a diamond mine, the next a patent lamp for a ten thousand foot level, warranted to burn under the most trying circumstances and not explode; while the next man tells me there is silver in the Free State and lead in Pretoria. I don't doubt it, but they carry the latter in the form of pencils! No, my worthy Boer, you are not the only man who wants to make my fortune, and incidentally your own, in five minutes. I have interviewed others to-day already."

"I bet no one has brought you samples like these."

"Yes, they are good I will admit, but where is the mine? What about labour conditions, water supply and so on? One has to take so many things into consideration."

"Labour? Well, the Vuurklip organisation could serve this mine too. I will tell you that much, and there's a river right through it, at least, a few hundred yards away, about as far as you can spit."

"That sounds almost too American to be true. What is your idea of payment? In fact, what is your proposition with regard to the mine? I, personally, cannot buy a big undertaking. If the mine is as large as you say, it will take a huge capital to work it."

"That is so, but you, as Managing Director to the Vuurklip, could have a big say in persuading the Luilekkerland Diamond Company to buy it."

"And?"

"You and me would go halves in what they paid."

"Umph! Is it yours to sell?"

"No. But I think I can work the matter so that I buy cheap. You would have to find the cash for that. I've got nothing."

"So? A financier without capital. There are many in the world. At what figure do you think you could buy?"

"Three thousand five hundred, perhaps less, perhaps more."

"And you estimate the value at what?"

"A hundred and fifty thousand."

"So? That is a lot of money. I suppose you really mean half or quarter that." McGreedy pronounced the word money as though the "o" was a "u," *muneu*; he seemed to dwell lovingly on the word; his thick voice said the words slowly. Yet he showed no surprise at the amount Dutoit stated. A clever financier is never surprised; a successful financier is even often gloomy when he is making the best bargain. Gladness of the heart or gratitude do not influence the manner of a knight of the Bourse; he always wants a little more on the one side and wishes that less could be possible on the other.

Petrus Dutoit, knowing that he already had a verbal agreement with one man, was determined to get a written promise from the other, and after further arguing McGreedy saw that he was not to be deterred from his purpose. The ground was genuine; there was no getting away from that. McGreedy had no doubts whatever upon the subject, and finally he took a sheet of writing paper and wrote down the following:—

"Johannesburg, 9th November, 1913.

"Petrus Dutoit, Esqre.,

"Pietsrust, Luilekkerland.

"Dear Sir,

"Referring to our conversation, I now wish to place on record the following:

"Whereas I have satisfied myself that what you have discovered on the farm is true diamondiferous yellow ground, I am prepared to assist you to purchase the said farm for a sum not exceeding £3,600. Should I thereafter be able to dispose of the said farm for you, I to receive half of the purchase money you may receive.

"Yours faithfully."

"Now," said McGreedy, "you tell me the name of the farm and I will fill it in in the space I have left and sign it."

"Clevedon No. 277," Dutoit replied.

"Clevedon? Why, that is only a few miles from the Vuurklip mine?"

"That is so," Dutoit replied. "So you see what I said about labour and water was no lie."

"So I see. Now about the purchase price of £3,600. That, of course, must be deducted and repaid to me before division."

"No fear," Dutoit replied. "I've had the work; you find the money and we go halves, not a blooming sixpence less."

"But that is not exactly halves. I shall be the loser," said McGreedy gently.

"Well, I like that. You pay a paltry £3,600, scoop in sixty or seventy thousand, and you are the loser! No, you will pay the first go off, and then we divide halves of the final price. Why, if I hadn't come to you you'd have made nothing, never have heard of it in fact, for it's a secret; they know nothing."

"Naturally, or you as a fond relative would not make quite such a profit. Well, as you will, I am not a mean man. I give in on that point, but the three thousand odd is a lot of money for me to find before I see the handling of the other. Still, we financiers take our risks I suppose. You must come to me again, Mr. Dutoit, if you hear of anything else. Have a cigarette? But perhaps you don't smoke."

"Oh, yes, I do, but I generally prefer cigars."

"Sorry I have none," said McGreedy as he pushed his cigarette case towards him, and proceeded to sign the letter.

"You expect to complete the purchase of the farm soon I hope," said McGreedy, handing him the letter.

"Ja, quite soon," Dutoit replied, as he made his adieux, and McGreedy, having made as he thought a profitable bargain, forgot for a moment the Governor's dinner party, and shook hands with the Boer.

When Dutoit got outside the office, and once again found himself in Marshall Street, he pushed his hat jauntily to one side, and stuck the cigarette unlit into his mouth.

"Oh, you schelm, I have got you," he said in his thoughts. "And now to take a rise out of Vancohn!"

CHAPTER XI

PETRUS DUTOIT returned to the hotel at which he had put up, and carefully made a copy of the letter given to him by Mr. McGreedy, without however putting in the signature, and armed with this copy he went to see Mr. Abraham Vancohn. So great had become the conviction in Dutoit's mind that the farm was now almost, if not actually his, that he began to feel a keen delight in life, and wondered how soon he would be able to order himself some new clothes and big cigars. He didn't think he would care for a motor car; he had ridden and driven horses all his life; he still had a feeling of fear for the possible machinations of a motor car; he hoped to live a long time if he should ever come into this money, yes, and live every hour of it; there was a vein of viciousness in his nature, only restrained because he had lacked the means to indulge in his passions to their fullest extent, but small incidents and sordid details show what a man is made of. There were some ugly stories told about him in the Luilekkerland district, which stories, however, were usually kept from the ears of Gloria and her little brother, for they had had little experience with the darker sides of life, and though Mrs. Fairbain loved gossip and relished scandal, still she had been moulded in character greatly by her husband, and a certain refinement in him had been grafted as it were on to her, and this delicacy of thought was a legacy they had bestowed upon their children.

Abraham Vancohn, the slender, sallow-faced Jew, sat in his office and spread his webs. He hoped much from his verbal promises to Petrus Dutoit, for at the bottom of his heart he despised all Boers. He admired the slimness of those who lacked honour, but thought he could easily pitch his cunning and educa-

tion against any man who only boasted Colonial blood. He had no use for the honest Boers; therefore they never entered into his calculations, unless opportunity came his way of fleecing them, but occasionally he found it expedient to use as his weapons the type of Boer who prefers knavery to genuine hard work, but there was no love lost between them. There are villains who inspire a certain amount of confidence, and even burly burglars who gain love, but in South Africa the schemers only hang together by mutual dishonesty for fear they might lose a share in a deal. Yet they hate each other, are jealous of each other, and are ever willing to sell each other, if only something more can be gained thereby; and the worst of the Johannesburg scoundrels is that the blackguard is usually also a snob. Dick Turpin was a genuine gentleman in comparison—but then, Dick Turpin did not live out there!

Petrus Dutoit swung himself into the office of Vancohn, and walked across the private room into which he was admitted with heavy footsteps, his hat on his head, for the manners of certain Boers leave much to be desired, and he only “behaves,” and that awkwardly, if he happens to have his best clothes on. Petrus Dutoit spread himself out on the chair near the writing table at which Vancohn was seated, and sticking his hands into his pockets said:

“Well, I’ve got a darned good thing on.”

“Ah? Good-day, I am glad to hear it. So the drill has proved a success, eh?” Vancohn replied suavely.

“What about a cigar?” asked the Boer.

“Always one ready for you, my good fellow,” Vancohn replied, producing a box. “I was hoping to see you soon, and I am delighted that you have come to-day. Now, what news have you for me?”

“Seventy-five per cent., I think it was, you wanted?” asked Dutoit, withdrawing his hands from his pockets in order to take a cigar and light it.

“Seventy-five per cent. was certainly the arrangement we made.”

"Well, I can get halves!"

"You! what the——" the sentence remained unfinished. Vancohn for once was astonished out of his usual calm, but quickly his legal mind controlled his features, and he smiled while his long thin fingers gently caressed a ruler.

"A good joke very. I suppose you mean to infer that the drill has proved such excellent results that you are entitled to ask more, but a bargain is a bargain, my friend. There is no going back upon our arrangement. Come, what have you found? One needs facts before one becomes assertive. This is hardly the mood to assume when you come to interview me. Please don't put your foot on my writing table; even if you have had great success, I am not interested in your boots."

Dutoit uncrossed his legs and removed the offending foot, which certainly had been placed on the edge of the table as he tilted back his chair.

"I'm not gassing. I mean what I say, Vancohn. I've got a genuine offer for halves, and a scrap of paper to prove it. You wouldn't give me anything in writing. No, we just talked, we did; but my other friend means business, he does. Ja."

"Do you mean to tell me you have had the audacity to lay your plans before a third party? I understood it was to be a confidential matter between you and me."

"So it would have been if you had treated me fair, but seventy-five per cent. and me doing all the work."

"But I was to find the capital."

"So will my other friend."

"And the money I gave you for the drill?"

"Ach, I bought the drill. The money wasn't wasted."

Vancohn looked at Petrus Dutoit, and as he saw the nonchalance with which he smoked the cigar he had asked for, Vancohn smiled again. He began to feel that the man opposite him was worthy of his steel. For cool impudence and lack of any pretensions to honesty this Boer would be hard to beat. If only his

hands had not been quite so clammy, and his victim had been some man other than himself, Vancohn would like to have shaken hands with him. He seemed to have found a twin brother.

"Would you mind showing me that scrap of paper?" he asked in his blandest manner.

Petrus Dutoit sought in the inner pocket of his coat and soon produced the copy he had made of McGreedy's letter, and laid it before Vancohn.

"This is nothing. You have written it yourself," the lawyer remarked after he had picked it up in his most casual manner and glanced at it.

"I have the original at the hotel. I am not such a fool as to carry round my valuables. A sample of writing, as a sample of ground, is enough. As for my having written it, I may be a good scholar, but I copied that. I never could have put the words so."

Vancohn pursed up his lips and again scrutinised the letter. The paper was merely the paper of the hotel at which Dutoit had put up. The writing was bad, the sort of scrawl a man who made little use of his pen might have, but the composition, that hardly suggested Petrus Dutoit. So it seemed there was something in this after all.

He handed back the unsigned letter, and drew his lips together in a manner of his when thought was hard at work in his brain, and without further reference to it he asked:

"And considering that you now have further proofs of the value of this mine, what is the ultimate price you think it will sell for?"

"A hundred and fifty thousand," Dutoit replied, and Vancohn only slightly raised his eyebrows as he replied, "You gain nothing by trying to inflate the value of this mine. I presume you mean fifty thousand, and the hundred is a little jump of the imagination. Remember, I happen to know that you have been secretly working this plot. I think a word from me in the right quarter would end in your being bundled off your sister's farm."

"But you wouldn't do that."

"Why?"

"Because it wouldn't gain you nothing."

"And if you are to make an agreement with a third party, what is that to gain me, pray?"

"Nothing."

"Then why this argument?"

"Just to show you that there's other folks in the world besides Mr. Vancohn. If you'd have treated me fair like, I wouldn't have gone to the other man."

"And mentioned me to him?"

"No fear, I'm not a cake. I believe in keeping names apart when one has business to do."

"And if I agreed now to let you have half the purchase money, what would you say?"

"That that half mustn't be less than thirty-five thousand pounds."

"How many claims do you think the mine will pan out?"

"Six hundred."

"Well, since you seem determined to drive a hard bargain, and are so optimistic as to the results, I agree to give you half of the purchase money, and if the claims are as you say, then thirty-five thousand pounds."

"At least!"

"At least, hoping it will be very much more."

"Ach, that is good. Now I want it in writing."

"Oh, no, my slim friend, no writing of mine so that you go to yet another party, and show round as you did with this of Mr. . . . ?"

"Name don't count. I'm not caught so easily. Well, a letter I must have."

"To show."

"No. My word of honour I wouldn't." The Boer emphasised his speech by removing the cigar from his mouth with his left hand, while he brought down his right with a thump on the table.

"Your word of honour! You amuse me. No, my dear Dutoit, I will not give you a letter, but I will alter the arrangement from seventy-five to halves."

"No. I want it in writing."

"Then you don't trust me."

"No. I never trust a lawyer, nor any other man for the matter of that."

"Well, you will get no letter out of me."

"All right then, you will be the loser, Mr. Vancohn. You will come to me yet, and come to your senses at the same time. Ja, you won't let so good a thing as this slip."

"And in the meantime you will do what?"

"Wait a bit. I'm in no hurry. The yellow ground won't turn red and the mine won't run away. I'll get my terms, and in writing too."

"But you say you have your own terms, and in writing too, from the other party. Why give me the preference?"

"Well, you're a lawyer. If there should be a bit of a fuss over anything, you'd know how to get me and yourself out; the other man ain't a lawyer, that's all."

"And he is what?"

"Never you mind. He exists, and is in a big position too. Well, I'll say, 'So long.' When you will give me that letter I'll start business, and not before. I'll take a bit of a holiday. You can both wait, you and the other man, but you'll be coming to me before long. You're not so flush at offering cigars as you was last time, but I'll take another just the same."

"You are a cool customer."

"Ja, I've no one to look after Petrus Dutoit but Petrus Dutoit, and there ain't no flies on him you will find."

"I feel convinced of it."

"Well, 'So long.'"

"Good-day, or 'So long,' if you prefer it."

Petrus Dutoit swung himself out of the office, and after he had gone Mr. Abraham Vancohn looked long and lovingly at his slender hands and filbert nails, and then with a sigh he said to himself:

"If only Dutoit had been a Jew, or an even pre-sentable Gentile, I'd have offered him a partnership!"

CHAPTER XII

TOM HILLIER, the General Manager of the Vuurklip Mine, was a man who combined a thoroughly capable business head with the heart of a man who is a man and not merely a mechanical implement, used as a lever between selfish directors and needy workmen; the result being that the directors respected, although they did not always praise him, and the employees were more honest and less needy than they would otherwise have been. Used from boyhood to hard work, and thinking more of that work than of the usual dissipations of life, Tom Hillier bid fair to be a worker all his life; rich he was never likely to be, for only the schemers reap the harvests the workers plant, yet, on the other hand, he found interest in life where other men only found anxiety, and pleasure where his compeers might have been bored stiff with satiety; and in his little dark-haired wife, Tom Hillier had a helpmate in the true sense of the word. Alice Hillier had come to South Africa during the war in 1900 and acted as nurse at the Deelfontein Military Hospital, while her two brothers fought with their regiments; the brothers had both lost their lives, while Alice, as the result of a splinter from a burst shell, had lost to a great degree the use of her left arm; nursing had therefore become an impossibility, and, with her, as with so many in life, misfortune followed closely on the heels of misfortune, her parents in England died leaving her nothing of more value than their blessing, and an insurance policy worth a little over a thousand pounds. Alice had, therefore, to continue to earn her living, though life seemed hardly worth the striving for, she took up Journalism and was fortunate enough to obtain con-

stant work on a Johannesburg daily newspaper and it was while in pursuit of "copy" for her paper that she had encountered Tom Hillier, who was on a week-end visit from the Derdepoort Diamond Mine, where he was then employed as resident engineer; thus the friendship started which soon ripened into something more, and when Tom Hillier was offered the post of General Manager to the Vuurklip Mine, they were married and started housekeeping together on that outlying dorp. This all happened four years ago, and with each passing year the comparative loneliness of that place had seemed to draw them closer together, they were true companions and enjoyed their few spare hours together, when, instead of bemoaning the fact that the nearest bioscope show was many, many miles away, and other amusements at least a days journey off, they would often beguile the time by endeavouring to devise amusements for the employees on the Mine, and think out plans of future possibilities for obtaining both pleasure and comfort for their people on the Mine.

Alice Hillier knew South Africa well, too well, some folks thought, and had suffered so much during her period of earning her own living that, unlike the many nobodies who have married the quickly-made-rich, she sympathised with her own sex, and loved the man she had mated with, all the more because he was a worker and not a waster. When she first went to the Mine, she found that the cold selfishness of cast had frozen the milk of human kindness in even that small community; thus the wife of the Compound Manager was willing to play tennis with the wife of the Mine Captain, but did not even say good-morning to the wife of the Engine driver; while the wife of the storekeeper did not know that carpenters had wives. It was not so much a question of cattishness and cruelty as sheer ignorance of the blessedness arising from conviviality, and also a fixed South African dread of being afraid to know the wrong person, for fear the so-called right one might object. The freedom of the Colonies! it is merely

a figure of speech and except in cases where, there being only three people gathered together in the wilds, they must know each other or go mad, the society high, medium and low, of the Colonies has its castes and stages and strict etiquette as unflinchingly absurd and starched as the dullest provincial town in England. But Alice Hillier soon stopped all that nonsense, she had lived to some extent a Bohemian life and benefited by the experience, therefore she determined to get all the joy out of life she could and help the people on the mine to get some brightness from each other.

She invited the wives of the staff, who dwelt in brick houses, to tea to meet the wives of the women who lived the other end of the village in tiny corrugated iron houses, boasting of no bricks at all, and arranged for them to play tennis together and also get up concerts and entertainments for them all to attend, so that the men of the mine should not indulge in so-called "smoking concerts" which were, in reality, nothing but drinking bouts, alone, but their wives and children be able to join in legitimate fun, and when there was a dance, the farmers and their wives living near were also invited.

And so it happened that Gloria received an invitation to attend a Mine Dance, and since it meant a drive back to the Farm so late and so far, Mrs. Hillier very kindly asked her to stay the night, and great was Gloria's excitement at the prospect of such an outing.

The idea of a new dress was out of the question. At Clevedon, Gloria and her mother had two new dresses a year, one for summer and one for winter, both, of course, were "best" dresses, and anything else in the way of clothing they made for themselves. So the last summer's "best dress" was carefully ironed out to wear at the dance, and a very pretty flowered delaine it was, a pale cream with dainty sprigs of pink rosebuds sprinkled, as it were, all over the material, with little pale green leaves. Now Gloria possessed no jewels save the brightness of her

eyes and the glow of youth and health in her cheeks, but the crown of richly tinted hair was a diadem to be proud of, though like most girls she thought little of her own charms and, sometimes, sighed for the pretty things made by man, forgetting that her Creator had given her gifts greater than wealth. Gloria had, of course, a very pretty hat to match the dress, but she could not wear the hat to the dance, so she took off the wreath of leaves and rosebuds and turned them into a chaplet for her hair, and, as it happened to be only a week after her birthday, she had just the gloves to wear, for Louis Martino had bought her a pair of long, white kid ones, true they were a size too big, and, at the time, she had wished he had given her a more serviceable colour, but how usefully they came in now; in fact, one could almost believe that some little bird had whispered to Martino about the forthcoming dance and hence the white kid gloves had been chosen.

At the last moment Petrus Dutoit announced his intention of going to the dance also, and said he would drive Gloria there; Gloria felt a momentary disappointment at this, as she had arranged to stay the night with the Hilliers, while if her uncle went, there was no reason why she should not return with him. Petrus Dutoit, however, vouchsafed the information that he should be staying the night at the mine himself, as he wanted to see someone at Vuurklip on business, and he would, therefore, drive Gloria home the next day; he could get a bed with one of the men on the mine, therefore, the arrangement Gloria had made with the Hilliers would not be interfered with.

The drive to Vuurklip was passed mostly in silence, Gloria was happy in the thought that to-night she would dance the first dance with her sweetheart, for they had not met at a similar function before, and to her the Cape-cart seemed more like a golden Chariot than an ordinary farm vehicle, not even the presence of her silent and much disliked uncle, served to weigh down her spirits or depress her in the least, he, in

fact, ceased to exist and might have been a Kaffir boy for all she cared, for was not Vuurklip drawing nearer every minute and the joys of a whole evenings pleasure; would Louis wear evening dress?—yes, she was quite convinced he would, for, of course, he must have such a suit in his possession, having lived in towns and also been to London once-upon-a-time. How would he look? better than all the other men of course, what very nice brown eyes he had, she wondered she had not particularly noticed him that first time, they had met to play tennis at a neighbouring farmer's, but was the Louis Martino she now knew, really the same man? It is so hard to kiss a face and remember you once only bowed to it, either the past or the present must be unreal, and it is much more pleasant to believe in the now and regard the past as a dream, at least so Gloria felt.

They arrived at Vuurklip at sunset and Gloria got down at the gate of the General Manager's house, a boy in the garden came forward and carried her bag containing the delaine frock, and her little toilet requisites to the house, and there Gloria received a hearty welcome from Mr. and Mrs. Hillier.

"I was going to give you the room we usually keep for the visits of the Directors, Gloria," Mrs. Hillier said, "but lo, and behold, this afternoon we had to send the car into Pietsrust, for a wire came saying that Mr. Vancohn would be here for the night, so I shall have to give you Tom's dressing-room."

"I am sure it will be very nice, and it is so good of you to have me," Gloria replied, and Mrs. Hillier responded :

"Oh, my dear, it is a blessing to put up a female, I get so many of the other sex staying here that I begin to wonder if I am a man or woman myself. I shall certainly be able to run an Hotel after this. How is little Johannes?"

"We think he is much better, thank you, but the great thing is he feels so himself. Of course, he will never be like other boys, but, perhaps, we love him all the more on that account, one gets so attached to

anyone, or any animal even, one has to specially take care of."

"How did the little lamb thrive you rescued from the Lammervanger, Gloria? Mr. Martino told me all about that, it was very brave of you. I intended to ask Mr. Martino, by the way, to come and dine here to-night. I ask most of the men in turn for I am a thorough Bohemian, but when I got notice of the arrival of Mr. Abraham Vancohn, I had to squash my intended hospitality, of course I could not ask a director of the Vuurklip to meet so humble a person as one of the employees, even though the employee should happen to be of cleaner blood, and have had as good an education as this exalted personage; now don't open your eyes so widely, Gloria, I am only stating a fact in a bald way, instead of covering it with polite fiction in the South African fashion; can I do you up or undo you?"

"Thank you so much, and what a nice room, are you sure Mr. Hillier won't mind my sleeping here?"

"Of course, he will mind quite a lot you silly little thing, and if you snore he is certain to shoot you! See, this door leads into our room, so if any of your admirers at the dance strive to make a night raid and carry you off, we shall know all about it; now have you everything you need? We dine at seven to-night and then go over to the dance about eight, we cannot give late balls as the men must go on shift at an early hour in the morning, so we do not keep even Cinderella hours but usually finish about eleven. Just touch your bell when you are ready to be done up. I have no white servant, and my native girl is very clumsy; Tom does me up. You will have to get married, Gloria, a husband is indispensable so long as frocks and blouses fasten at the back, I verily believe dress-makers are in league with the shopkeepers who sell wedding rings, and so the fashion will keep in. Yes, Tom, I'm coming! Do you hear that voice, Gloria? There is anger in it, no, not because you are occupying the dressing-room, but because my husband has probably lost his collar stud, when a

man loses his one-and-only he becomes a fiend incarnate and I believe half the divorces start from some such incompatibility of temper, the lost stud of a man takes more getting over than the lost reputation of a woman; now I have shocked you—Bye-bye.” Little Mrs. Hillier skipped away and Gloria made haste to unpack the delaine frock.

At dinner that night Mr. Vancohn was introduced to Gloria, and her exquisite colouring and dainty personality appealed to his sense of beauty; he was surprised when he heard that she was the daughter of a farmer, and could not quite reconcile her charm of manner with what he hitherto had seen of the Boer class, true Gloria spoke with a slight Colonial accent, but not to a degree of ugliness, for her father was a well educated man and had the voice and the intonation of a well-bred Englishman, thus from childhood, Gloria had heard English spoken as it should be and not as it is so often mistoned rather than mispronounced in South Africa. When, during the course of conversation, Gloria mentioned Clevedon as being the name of their farm, Mr. Vancohn had to summon all his legal restraint to prevent him showing his amazement. So this slender beautiful girl lived on the property he and her uncle were hoping to defraud the family of! It was almost dramatic and certainly interesting, but did not arouse one thought of compassion in Mr. Vancohn’s breast, business is business and a pretty girl does not alter that fact, still Mr. Vancohn was sufficiently masculine to enjoy Gloria’s society, and wished to stand as a fine specimen of the male in her eyes. He ceased talking to Mr. Hillier about matters of the mine and rather spread himself out, knowing that some women and many girls admired his emaciated type and considered him delicate and, therefore, interesting. Gloria was a little shy and he took that shyness as a compliment to himself not having the power to see that behind Gloria’s shyness lay a great and noble courage, and a heart, that through grief, sorrow and privation, would beat as truly as when only sunshine gladdened her pathway.

Mr. Vancohn talked about himself and his excursions, taken at long intervals, to Europe, he did not, in the least, mind if his hearers were interested or not, being a man of his type, he was always intensely interested in himself and in his own conversation, and, as he talked on about Art—pronounced with a very capital A—he enjoyed listening to himself and felt he was instructing those around the table at the same time; if they cared for pictures mattered not. Mr. Hillier, on mentioning a specially prized steel engraving he possessed was immediately squashed, and Mrs. Hillier only got the chance of speaking when Mr. Vancohn's mouth was full of food, and words an impossibility; and then she managed to remark that she wished the Johannesburg patrons of Art loved pictures more for their own sake than for the incidental advertisement they got out of patronising them.

"Still, if the people get the pictures in the long run then they benefit, so the back-scratching of the donors doesn't count," Tom Hillier remarked during a brief pause, during which time Mr. Vancohn was extracting the stone of a plum from his mouth and Mrs. Hillier making use of her pocket handkerchief. Tom Hillier talked little as a rule at his own table, for his wife was a veritable chatterbox and rattled on whenever she got the chance, for, as she had explained to him—"For so many years when I lived in Johannesburg I had to write that which I didn't want to, and refrain from saying all that I was aching to give vent to, that now I am free from having to earn my daily bread, I feel I must make up for lost time, and so I talk, talk, talk, and never write, and, please God, I never shall put pen to paper again."

When dinner was over, wraps were donned by the ladies and they sat out on the stoep while the men enjoyed a quiet smoke before proceeding to cross to the mine Boarding house where the dance was to be held. Gloria was longing to be off, her little feet seemed to step through imaginary dances as she waited, seated in the deep basket chair, unable almost to enjoy the calm beauty of the night, so riotously

ran the blood through her veins, youth clamouring for youth; to her Mr. Hillier and his wife seemed quite old, for they had lived, she was but at life's portal, while as for Mr. Vancohn, to her he seemed more aged still, for in his eyes she unconsciously read the experience of so many of life's fires lived through and died out, she conceived a violent dislike for his personality, his thin body reminded her of Pharaoh's lean kind, gaunt and ugly, while his long, white fingers made her shiver, she wondered if they could clasp the throat of a bird, and if that false smile would creep across the sallow, thin face at the same time; the very manner in which he displayed his interest in her repulsed her, she hated him, yet felt a little angry with herself that it should be so, for he was more than polite and seemed to wish to be friendly to her, though why he should take so much trouble she could not understand, she had promised to dance with him during the evening, and he had further invited her to dance with him should he ever meet her at a ball in Johannesburg which possibility, however, seemed to Gloria about as likely as attending a Royal Court in Europe, she was not, even in her dreams, thinking of going to Johannesburg for pleasure, the bare idea of the money it would cost was enough to put an end to such a thought even if it had come uppermost; while as for having to go to Johannesburg on any business, that, of course, was in her mind, entirely out of the question. How little human beings know of the plots being woven around them, and, in most cases, how fortunate it is that ignorance is their lot.

At length Mrs. Hillier announced that she had finished her cigarette and the men could finish their cigars as they walked across to the mine. She and Gloria were soon ready to start.

Needless to say, Louis Martino was eagerly waiting for Gloria at the entrance to the mine, and, as soon as she had left her wrap in the cloakroom, temporarily made of the mine Surveyor's office, he carried her off to dance with him, the waltz then being

played on the piano by Mrs. Walters, the wife of one of the carpenters. A violinist had been engaged from Pietsrust, and the music, to Gloria's ears, seemed heavenly, the floor perfect and the flag and paper decorations of the mine dining-room, where the dance was being held, quite brilliant, she surely was the happiest girl in the room, and, in the eyes of the majority, the prettiest also.

"Do you like the wreath in my hair, Louis? or was it silly to wear it?" Gloria asked anxiously, during a pause to take breath.

"I like everything, Gloria, you are just lovely, you couldn't help yourself, for you are my Gloria."

And Gloria felt at that moment that she loved all the world and all the other worlds if there were any more, for praise to her was like the warmth of sunshine, the dew of evening, or the shade of protection, she expanded beneath it and became more beautiful and more lovable.

Louis Martino took such care of her, too, she was to him something so precious, so wonderful, so to be revered that none of the trivial liberties of flirtation seemed adaptable to their companionship, and when he was not dancing with her, they sat on the chairs drawn up at one end of the room and watched the others dance, and talked gently to each other; he did not ask her to walk with him outside, the thought that the other men might make remarks or the girls giggle as they passed, seemed to Louis Martino too horrible! Gloria was a flower, she must not have the bloom of her beauty bruised by contact with the commonplace. Martino was in his way an idealist.

As was to be expected, Gloria did not lack offers of partners and though she would have much preferred to remain with Louis the whole evening, still, as their engagement had not yet been announced, they thought it better that she should dance occasionally with some of the many men present, Louis remarking that it didn't matter if he didn't dance, as there were always more men than girls

at mine dances, and no one would notice him if he went out for a cigarette occasionally.

One of the men who noticed the entrance of Gloria was King Snyman, the machine man. He had seen her before, yes, he remembered that she was the girl he had noticed get out of a cart at Pietsrust, so the girl, "Gloria" as he had heard her called then, was actually here at the mine dance, well, this was a bit of luck, for if ever anyone had fallen in love at first sight, he had, and the momentary glimpse of that fair face had haunted him ever since; he saw her in his dreams, he silently drank to her when he raised his glass, he had never expected to see her again, had made no enquiries about her; she just stood out in his memory, as a special hour of youth may be remembered in old age.

One does not usually stand on much ceremony at mine dances, indeed, the people present usually know each other as they also know all the inhabitants of the country around, but there are a few exceptions, and some women insist on correct introductions, while some men are too shy to ask them to dance without, and, as King Snyman was a comparatively new hand at the Vuurklip mine, he was a little uncertain of the etiquette observed there, and since Gloria had made her entrance by the side of Mrs. Hillier and accompanied by Mr. Vancohn, King Snyman determined he would ask his lawyer friend for an introduction.

King Snyman looked across to where Gloria was seated by the side of Louis Martino, he had seen the bright smile that passed between them, he measured Louis Martino with his mind's eye. Yes, he was a well-knit, well set up, good-looking chap, a bit too thin for his liking, yet, not to be denied, smartly turned out, a bit foppish, perhaps, else why had he got a white waistcoat on and those white gloves? few of the men wore gloves, perhaps Martino had expected Gloria, they seemed to be old friends. King Snyman wished he had dressed himself more carefully, true he had put on his best dark suit, but it

wasn't the same as real dress clothes, and he had no gloves, still, he was a lot bigger than Martino, many women had liked him in the past, yes, plenty of them, and, after all, who was Gloria?—she hadn't the smart impudent air bred of a South African town, she seemed too quiet, too shy, and yet was radiant, such a strange mixture—he moved nearer, he even followed her with his eyes when she danced and then he went out to try and find Vancohn. He and Vancohn had met twice since he had been employed at the Vuurklip, and the business arrangement between them, made in Vancohn's office, was progressing favourably for them both and at a decided loss to the mine.

Mr. Vancohn was outside the mine boarding-house standing in the shadow of some pepper trees when King Snyman espied him, as a matter of fact, Vancohn had caught sight of Petrus Detoit entering the room of one of the men in the unmarried quarters, and hoped he would return soon to the boarding-house as he was anxious to have a chat with him, if it could be obtained without detection, and he was annoyed when, instead of seeing Dutoit approaching him, he recognised King Snyman, and slightly turned away.

"Ach, man, of course I know you, why do you turn away?" said King Snyman, softly.

"Don't be a fool, Snyman, it wouldn't do for us to be seen together."

"Why not? This is a public function, we are on equal terms, so to speak, it's alright."

"Nothing is ever alright, as you call it, on a diamond mine, Hillier has got eyes and ears and . . ."

"But, ach, he'd never suspect you, no, I've nothing for you, I only want you to introduce me to the girl called Gloria."

"She is a friend of Mrs. Hillier's, go and ask her, it would be ridiculous for me to do so, remember I am a director, you an employee, I shall not stay long, I only came across just to look on—don't stay here, Snyman, I tell you it isn't safe."

"Then why are you outside instead of inside? Isn't that suspicious, to be in the dark without a girl?"

"I am having a smoke, and, as a director, I can prow! round if I like, there are some iron rails lying about, I shall want to know the meaning of it in the morning, the Co. cannot afford waste."

King Snyman chuckled to himself at the answer Vancohn gave.

"So long, Bram," he said softly, and turned away; and not long afterwards he sought out Mrs. Hillier, and, in a quiet respectful manner, begged that she would introduce him to Gloria, and Mrs. Hillier good-naturedly replied:

"Of course, I will, she is a good dancer and so pretty, don't you think? I hope you are all enjoying the dance. Now, you are a big athletic looking chap, will you help me when I arrange the men's sports for Xmas? I want the help of the men in the mine quite as much as the men on the staff."

"Ach, mam, you can reckon on me," King Snyman replied, and when Gloria was resting, the required presentation took place and Gloria promised to dance the next waltz with him. She would much have preferred to dance all waltzes with her fiancée, still the love in her heart made her kind to all, for that is the way with maids, the engaged girl is willing to embrace the earth, the engaged man experiences a keen desire to exterminate all other men who dare to glance at the girl of his choice.

There had existed, during the comparatively short time King Snyman had been on the mine, very little friendship between him and his mates and none at all between him and Louis Martino, for King Snyman, although at present on his good behaviour, was a drinking man and fond of a game of cards, and had no wish to play for tickes. Louis Martino preferred to spend his leisure hours at either sport or study, and when there was not a game of cricket or tennis to be had, he devoted his spare time to reading. True, at the weekly meeting of the Vuurklip Rifle

Club they had occasionally met, but even then they had been somewhat at loggerheads, having disputed about sighting and wind and various other matters, at any rate, there was no love between the two men and Martino experienced a feeling of repugnance when he saw the dainty Gloria borne away in the waltz by such a man as Snyman, and yet he could not object, he knew nothing tangibly wrong about him, but he hated the big, ugly, ungloved hands that held Gloria, yet many other men present also wore no gloves, that was no crime at a mine dance, some men even danced in heavy boots; while two Dutch women present wore clean, white aprons and black hats and black cotton gloves, their dresses being of the same sombre hue, for a Dutch woman usually regards black as being a festival colour for a married woman, while as for the Dutch men they invariably wear crêpe round their tawny coloured felt hats in memory of a departed wife, even after a new bride has been taken to their easily comforted bosom.

King Snyman, however, danced well, as so many Colonial men do, not in the most up-to-date manner perhaps, but easily, as the result of much practice, for dancing at the various mines and farms is a recreation within the reach of most, be the ballroom even a barn it matters not, whenever the Dutch assemble they dance, it is their sole accomplishment.

During the dancing of Gloria and King Snyman, Louis Martino felt he had no wish to withdraw and smoke, he was impatient to claim her after the dance as soon as opportunity should occur, but just as the waltz was ending, Mr. Hillier came up and spoke to him about a little matter connected with his work in the mine, and his attention was drawn away from the dancers. He answered politely to the questions Mr. Hillier asked him and also gave his opinion on a matter concerning the housing of the unmarried men, and when, at last, the General Manager passed on, the waltz had ended.

Louis Martino looked eagerly round the room, but Gloria and King Snyman had both disappeared!

CHAPTER XIII

DURING the waltz with Gloria, King Snyman lost his head and his heart more than ever, if indeed he had either to lose, for so selfish was he in his views of life that he was not likely to suffer in any way save through his appetites or his vanity. There was no doubt about it, Gloria differed in a marked degree from the women and girls in that mine boarding room. Certainly the smartest and most intelligent looking woman was Mrs. Hillier. Her well-shaped little head and pretty neck were well poised upon her shoulders, and her black hair plentiful and well arranged, while her little body always was well apparelled, and she walked and moved with the dignity so many little women possess; not a beauty, certainly, but her eyes were a clear grey, and shaded by eyelashes as dark as her hair. Yes, she was certainly a nice little woman; lost perhaps if she had appeared amongst a crowd in Europe, yet conspicuous in South Africa, where, with a few exceptions, women do not wear their clothing well, or indeed know what to wear.

The other women were mostly the wives of the mine employee's, and had done their best to look nice. Many succeeded in looking that, and no more, while one or two farmer's wives had essayed to copy the latest fashions as copied from the magazines from "home," the result being a strange medley of indescribable mixtures, the wrong touch of colour in the wrong place, and so on. The girls had mostly been wise, or their parents had had wisdom for them, and their simple white or coloured muslin frocks were adorned with old-fashioned but never-the-less pretty sashes. Only in hair dressing had their fancies in

some cases led them in weird directions. Stolid faces of heavy Colonial girls looked absurd set in a halo of hair arranged on "frames" and decked out with imitation diamond pins or huge impossible bows of ribbon. Gloria, with her little wreath, looked sweetness personified, one thought of a May-day and blossoms in Spring; yet a glow of warmth about her seemed to tell the story of how English blood had mixed with the blood of the South, and the palour of snowdrops been kissed by the African sun.

King Snyman came to the conclusion before he had waltzed round the room a half-dozen times that Gloria was the girl for his ticket; it was fine to hold her so near to him, so near that once Gloria said gently: "Would you mind not holding me so tightly? you make me out of breath," and she laughed a nervous little laugh. She was no coward when she faced danger she knew of, but instinct gave her at times a timidity she could not understand, and not being of a retrospective nature did not attempt to analyse.

King Snyman felt that it was good to know that he was dancing with the prettiest girl in the room. Good to feel the sweetness of her breath fan his face, good to glance at her and see the beaming eyes, the slightly parted richly coloured lips, good to see the little shells of ears,—yes, Gloria was the girl for him.

In South Africa, in affairs of the heart one travels quickly, and whether it be climate, temperament, or what, one knows not, but a South African soon makes up his mind if he hates or loves. Though he lacks the poetical nature of the Italian or the fiery external passion of the Spanish, his face remains mostly as impassive as usual, his movements as slow, but there springs into life a boiling ferment beneath the stolid exterior, and having no music in his soul, the man becomes brutal in hatred and dominating in love. One has only to notice the worn-out looking faces of some of the Boer wives to know that; old before their time if thin, and bloated, heavy, dead lumps of flesh if inclined to be corpulent; but no lingering youth in

advancing years as is the portion of some English women.

As the waltz neared its close, King Snyman slowly relaxed his grip of Gloria's waist, and slipped her arm through his as he said: "Now we'll go out and get a breath of air."

"Oh, but I think——" began Gloria.

"Here is the door, ach it will be fresher outside; don't bother about Martino, he's busy with the governor."

"Gloria cast a hasty glance at Louis Martino, who however did not notice her, so busily was he engaged talking to Mr. Hillier, and before she had time to protest further, King Snyman had drawn her outside the door leading to the open space which surrounded on three sides the boarding house.

Here and there an electric lamp burned, but after the gaily lit up dancing room it appeared dark here by contrast; in the corners where the shadows were densest couples giggled, and Gloria experienced a feeling of disgust.

"Don't you think it is nicer inside the ball room?" she asked.

"Ach, nee, it isn't very nice here though, with those giggling fools over yonder; come this way, it will be more pleasant over there."

"But I would rather return," said Gloria.

"And I would rather not just at this minute," Snyman replied. "Come, don't be disagreeable; you are too pretty for that, and we are going to get on well together, you and me, ain't we?"

"I hope so," Gloria replied, at the same time thinking it was hardly a good start in that direction for the man to so disregard her wishes.

King Snyman, however, did not release the grip he had on her arm, and Gloria feeling convinced that the man was not drunk, and therefore not wishing to seem to distrust him, suffered herself to be led across the ashes that crumbled beneath her feet, to where at a little distance there was to be seen an archway between two buildings.

"Which part of the mine is that?" she asked.

"Oh, that is the search house, where the boys are detained, you know, before they leave the mine, so as to be certain they take no stones away with them."

"Stones."

"Diamonds, of course, rough diamonds; we always just say stones for short. Now, if you like, I will take you through that passage. I know the time-keeper and head guard on duty, and I will show you the mine by night; the arc-lights look fine, you know, and the mine is a pretty deep hole, but no danger. I'll take care of you. Would you like to go?"

"No, thank you very much," Gloria replied. "You see I am engaged for the next dance, and I wouldn't like to miss it."

"The next dance isn't for ten minutes or more. I heard the fiddle player say he must get a drink."

"And Mr. Martino——" began Gloria.

"Won't thank you if you worry him when he is busy with the boss," said Snyman craftily.

"It is very kind of you, but I prefer not to go," said Gloria. "Somehow I have no wish to see the mine, but why I do not know. What is that other building I can see in the distance?"

"The Hospital."

"Do many go there?"

"Well, a fair few of boys; some enterics and a few accidents. The white men go to Pietsrust as a rule if they get hurt, unless they are married, and then they can sometimes be treated at home."

"But how dreadful to think that anyone should ever get hurt, and all because women wear jewellery," observed Gloria.

"You are too soft hearted," said Snyman. "But I don't object to that in a woman. I don't suppose you would mind wearing a few diamonds if you had 'em."

"I have no special craving that way. I think there are so many more beautiful things in the world that glitter less, though, of course, I have not seen much of the world."

"You shall some day."

"I?"

"Yes, if you stick to me. I mean to be rich some day."

"But, Mr. Snyman, I have only just met you. Of course you are joking."

"Not a bit of it. Ach, I saw you weeks, months ago, and I heard your name, Gloria! Come over there, it's darker there. I want to tell you something."

"No, I cannot go; really I cannot. I want to go back." There was a ring of distress in Gloria's voice that warned Snyman that he must go more warily.

"All right, you shall; I won't bother you any more to-night, but just you remember me and what I say. I mean to be a rich man some day, and you shall have all you want. I'll look down at the farm before long."

They had turned now from the direction of the search house.

"But we are not going back the same way," said Gloria.

"No, if we go past those pepper trees you miss the wind and get there just as soon. Besides, that door leads to the cloak room; you can tidy your hair before you go in if you've a mind to. It's blowing a bit. Are you cold?"

"No," said Gloria, but she shivered a little.

"Here, come inside my coat; we can walk so," and Snyman opened his coat. He was much taller than Gloria, thus she could not have sheltered from the wind as she walked, and such a suggestion was to her an insult. Snyman, however, held out his right arm as if to encircle her waist.

"Please allow me to pass, Mr. Snyman. What you suggest is impossible," said Gloria.

"And yet I had my arm round your waist while we were dancing. You didn't mind then."

"That was different."

"Very well, as you like."

But Snyman was not going to let Gloria escape him quite so easily. He took her arm and said: "I must hold on to you, or you will slip over these clinkers."

They neared the pepper trees and then heard voices talking in low tones.

Snyman put his finger to his lips and whispered "Hush," for the voices were the voices of men, and Snyman, true to his instincts, wanted to spy out who the men were. He felt certain Vancohn must have gone away long ago, and therefore was greatly surprised when two shadows moved slightly away from the trees, and both he and Gloria recognised Mr. Vancohn in deep conversation with Petrus Dutoit. This did not interest King Snyman very much, but Gloria wondered what it could possibly be that the two were in such close conversation about, especially as, when during dinner Gloria had mentioned her uncle, Mr. Vancohn had said nothing about knowing him. Her thoughts were however quickly turned into another direction, for King Snyman remarked:

"We have no luck. I thought no one would be in the shade yonder. Never mind, come along to my room; no one will notice you, and I can tell you a lot there. My prospects are good. Yes, you stick to me, my girl."

"Please release my arm, I must return at once to the dancers," said Gloria. "I can hear the music; I shall be late, and whatever will people think of me being out here with you. I told you before that I was engaged for the next dance." Gloria was beginning to feel most uncomfortable. Not only was her temper rising, but she felt that somehow all the beauty of the evening was getting tarnished; the quick fall from the happiness of the earlier part of the evening was too great. Tears were very near as she tried to draw her arm away.

"What does it matter if you miss a dance? Come, don't be silly. I always get my way with women, and I am not going to be snubbed by a girl, pretty as you are. Listen! No, don't look angry. If you

call you will only get laughed at. I mean you no harm, and I'm clean gone on you, and I mean to cut all the other fellows out. Now give me a kiss, and then I will take you back."

"I will do nothing of the sort. How dare you?"

"Miss Fairbain, I think this is our dance," said the voice of Louis Martino, so near that she thought he must have heard her last words. King Snyman felt certain too that Martino had interrupted purposely, and he scowled at him as he released Gloria's arm. He could have knocked him down when he saw the look Martino gave him in reply, but he wished to stand well in the eyes of Gloria, so he said:

"You will dance the next with me. Remember what I told you."

"I will never dance with you again; never, never, never," the voice of Gloria trembled, and before King Snyman could reply she ran quickly towards the dancing room, followed by Martino, who however did not run. He felt that Gloria probably wanted to be a few minutes alone. King Snyman stood quite still, but as he looked towards the retreating forms he clenched his fists and muttered: "I'll ruin that young prig, if he dares to come between me and Gloria; ruin his character; ja, and smash his features! Ach, but she's a lekker nooie!"

When Louis Martino saw Gloria again she had lost somewhat her radiant expression, and as she entered the dancing room from the door of the ladies' cloak room, she looked anxiously around and gave a sigh of relief when Martino joined her.

"I hope you did not mind losing this dance, Louis. I wanted to sit still a minute, all alone, and think."

"That brute upset you. I am sorry you went outside with him."

"I didn't want to. You are not angry with me?"

"No, dear, only—well don't let's talk about it. I feel like giving King Snyman a sjamboking."

"But you won't."

"I would like to."

"But he is bigger than you, Louis, and might hurt

you. Please don't. Besides he was only stupid, he wasn't drunk."

"Then his behaviour was all the worse; he had not even that excuse."

"But don't look so fierce, Louis; really you needn't."

"Anyway I am glad I came along when I did."

"So am I."

"What did the brute say to you?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter. See, people are staring at us. You look like a fierce turkey-cock. I hate to be stared at. Oh, I wish it was all over; the dance is spoilt."

"Come, dear, don't worry. We will go and get some sandwiches and lemonade. There is a buffet, you know. You will feel better then."

They crossed the chalked floor to a small side room where refreshments were being served, and here they joined Mrs. Hillier and some other people, and Gloria had a cup of tea, and soon forgot her temporary annoyance; for her's was a sunny nature and she felt it would hardly be kind to allow the impudence of one man to spoil the rest of the evening for herself and Louis. She, however, was glad when Mrs. Hillier asked her if she had had enough of gaiety and was ready to return home, for after her experience with King Snyman she felt annoyed at the idea of dancing with any other man than Louis. Mrs. Hillier permitted him to escort her and Gloria to the house, for Mr. Hillier had been called away by the doctor to see a boy who had been taken into hospital as the result of a fall of ground, and Mr. Vancohn seemed to have disappeared altogether.

The walk to the house was all too short, for the clear air seemed so fresh and sweet after the dust and heat of the boarding house, and Louis offered an arm to each of the ladies, for the road was rough and not well lit.

It was soothing to rest on Louis's arm. How gentle and kind he seemed, and how considerate.

He must have known that Gloria was still suffering

from some words King Snyman had said, for he did not slip his arm round her waist or do anything that might have appeared to assert his proprietorship at that moment, only his eyes looked into Gloria's when he said Good-night and she read there all the love he felt.

"You are rather pensive, my child," Mrs. Hillier observed to Gloria when she wished her Good-night.

"I was only thinking," said Gloria, "how men vary, how hateful are the same words spoken by different men."

"So you have found that out, my child. Then, of course, you must care for some special man. No, don't blush; I think I can guess, but I will not ask you any questions."

It was not until Gloria's head touched the pillow that she remembered that Mr. Abraham Vancohn had not claimed the promised dance.

How had he spent the evening? and why should he talk to the uncle and forget the niece?

Then Gloria thought no more about anybody excepting one man, and his name was on her lips as she closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Petrus Dutoit had decided to go to Vuurklip with Gloria, he was not altogether certain of seeing Mr. Vancohn there, but thought he would trust to luck, and in the event of not meeting him, he could at any rate spend the evening with a few pals he had amongst the men at the mine, and probably acquire information on various points of interest connected with the mine. He knew he was certain of getting a shake-down in the single men's quarters, probably with a man named Thorsen, an overseer in the mine, with whom and others he had spent more than one jovial evening over a game of cards and a bottle of whisky; for though there was no canteen on the mine the men could get their liquor out from Pietsrust by the bottle, and a certain set drank in their rooms so long as they had anything to drink. Mr. Hillier was doing his best, and using his influence as General Manager, to stamp out intemperance, but there are always black sheep on every dorp, who find no satisfaction in moderation and make beasts of themselves and call it pleasure, these men usually being of the unmarried order, and as a rule are not Dutch, for, except in occasional instances, the Dutch are a sober race and drink their eternal coffee instead of stronger liquor; intemperance is not one of their characteristics.

Some say the devil takes care of his own. Perhaps this is why fortune so often appears to favour the wicked, while opportunities for acquiring wealth seem not to occur to the honourably inclined. But life takes a long time to live and has a weird way of balancing up its account with human beings; justice exists, though we often have to wait for her to deal us our revenge, or right the wrong. Life so often seems unfair, because so many of us are under the

erroneous impression that life is short, and that the present period counts the most.

And so on the night of the dance Vancohn and Dutoit had met outside the boarding house, and the conversation between them was not edifying, exposing as it did the craft and selfishness of both. Vancohn found he had met his match in stubbornness, and that nothing was to be got out of Dutoit until he had given him the letter, embodying the agreement between them. Neither trusted the other, and yet they were each likely to be more than ordinarily useful to each other, and Vancohn, thinking the matter over, came to the conclusion that he was likely to be of more use to Dutoit than any other man Dutoit might make an agreement with; while on the other hand he, Vancohn, could not move a finger without the aid of Dutoit.

"If I give you a letter in some form, what guarantee have I that you will not show it or use it to my disadvantage?" he asked.

"Ach, you know as well as I do, that if I blow about you, I can't make use of you. If you got into bad repute as a lawyer, you wouldn't be the use to me I might want; you would be struck off the Rolls. Ja, I'm no fool, I know you can't geld a horse if you want him for a stallion. It's the same with men as horses, you can't cripple 'em if you want to use 'em."

"And so it is merely to safeguard yourself as to terms?"

"Ja."

"Well, I will do it."

"Good, being a lawyer I thought you'd see daylight soon, and not let this 'ere business slip. When can I have the letter?"

"Are you staying the night at Vuurklip?"

"Ja."

"Where?"

"Oh, I shall turn in with some of the men."

Mr. Vancohn smoothed his face with his fingers, and then said:

"If you call at the Store alone to-morrow morning

early, say at about half-past eight, I shall be there to buy a tooth-brush, having found that mine has been left behind. You will, of course, buy something also. I may be able to pass you an envelope, there are not likely to be many in the Store at that hour."

"No, better make it eight though, when the men on the mine are changing shift; they have no time to go shopping at the Store then."

"Very well. Now tell me how much further have you got with regard to persuading your dear relations to part with the farm."

"Not much; if only I could work it through the bond."

"There is a bond on the farm?"

"Ja."

"How much?"

"Two thousand."

"Which Bank?"

"The Luilekkerland."

"Good; I know the Manager. Do you know if the interest has been paid regularly?"

"Ja, so far, but they haven't got much money."

"Stock good?"

"Ja, worst luck."

"Cattle sometimes get mysterious diseases."

"Ja."

"And horses horse sickness."

"Ja."

"If I can arrange for the bond to be called in, can you do a little careful nursing elsewhere?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, only if the stock is good, they might sell and raise money also, and our work, my friend, yours and mine, be in vain. The farm must sell cheap if you and I are to make a haul over the transaction. Hush! Who was that?"

"Only two of the dancers. They've gone, but I'll be blamed if one of them wasn't my niece."

"Really? Could she have heard anything?"

"No fear, she had a man with her. Girls at dances never hear sense."

" Who was the man ? "

" A big sandy Boer ; don't know his name ; a new man at the mine ; leastways not here long. Ja, that would be the game, to press for the bond."

" And then ? "

" I can tell a yarn about having found a partner with money. My sister would rather sell to me. She'd think they could get the farm back then some day ; anyway it would stay in the family she would think."

" But not a word outside until it was yours, and then I would bring the matter up at a Board meeting."

" Ja."

" If I stay over to-morrow will you drive me to the spot where you have discovered the mine ? I can make it alright by saying I am visiting the farm to see about a forage contract, or something of the sort."

" Nee, not me."

" Well, surely you have a cart and some horses here ? Could you drive me there to-night ? One does odd things at a dance. No one would notice our absence from the festivities ; you could manage it."

" Nee, time enough when the farm is mine."

" You intend to keep the spot a secret until then ? "

" Ja."

" Well, I will see about the letter, but don't get drunk and lose it. That would not benefit either of us."

" I shall put away some whisky to-night with luck, but I'll be sober in the morning and ever after till the thirty-five thou comes my way."

" And then ? "

" Please God, I'll get drunk again."

" You are rather profane for a Boer, my friend. Tell me what sort of man is your brother-in-law ? "

" A blooming Englishman ; that's enough description, isn't it ? "

" For a man of your character, yes. So that accounts for the unusual manners of your niece."

" Gloria ? "

" Yes."

"She's a stuck-up girl, always sort of despises me, her own uncle too on her mother's side, but I'll be level with her when I get the farm."

"Make her a handsome present, no doubt?"

"Ja, a very handsome present; she won't sneer at me again, I reckon. I've got to get level with all that crowd. My sister isn't the same since she married William Fairbain; Fairbain indeed, Dutoit is a better name by a long neck, she should have stuck to her own people."

"With you as a sample before her eyes she evidently thought differently," said Vancohn with a smile.

"What do you mean?" Dutoit began to suspect the slender lawyer of a desire to jeer.

"I never mean more than I say, and sometimes less. Well, since you won't take me for a drive to-night, come up to Johannesburg quite soon, for I shall move on. I want a walk and a look round before I turn in. No, don't shake hands; not because I object to the Dutch habit of doing so on every and any occasion, but you must not forget that I am almost a stranger to you. There are many eyes about, or will soon be, now that the music has ceased. Good-night, Dutoit. Yes, I wish you all success with your lucerne, which you have decided to grow. Ah, King Snyman, is that you? So you are machine man here I am told. Hope you like your job. Good-night to you both."

Mr. Vancohn had spoken these last words to King Snyman, whom he discerned drawing near, and then he turned and walked away in the direction of the manager's house. King Snyman slinked away towards the search house, and Dutoit made off for the billiard room, where he felt certain he would meet his friends, who were not likely to be dancing.

The next day Vancohn visited the Store, as arranged, and returned to the manager's house, where he saw Gloria at breakfast, and apologised for having missed the waltz she had promised him the night before.

"You must really forgive me," he said. "My visits here are always on business, and pleasure is so unusual that my memory must be pardoned. I was very busy last night discussing various matters. The doctor wants improvements in the hospital, but you know, Hillier (turning to him) we cannot afford improvements, so long as we do all that the law compels us to do; that is all we can manage."

"The mine captain's house is held together by iron clamps and the single men live like sardines; it is insanitary," said Hillier.

"I am afraid the house of the mine captain doesn't interest me, and as for the single men, they must wait. Thank you, Mrs. Hillier, yes, I will take some more coffee; it is really excellent."

"Some of the men want to marry; we have no houses for them," continued Hillier.

"Well the mine is not run as a matrimonial agency, or a philanthropic institution; the men who want wives can be replaced by those who don't."

"But the married men are the more steady and reliable ones, I have heard Tom say," Mrs. Hillier interjected.

"Women always advocate matrimony, I believe," replied Vancohn. "I am a bachelor; I find it a very comfortable existence."

Tom Hillier opened his mouth to make a somewhat too truthful remark, then remembered in time that Vancohn was one of his Directors, so he swallowed his pride and some jam at the same time and said nothing.

"When are you coming up to Johannesburg, Miss Fairbain?" asked Vancohn.

"You asked me that at dinner last night, and I told you then that I didn't know. I have no special wish to go," Gloria replied.

"Oh, but we could show you something of life there. Johannesburg is, after all, the centre of things in South Africa. There are many pretty women there, but always room for another, you know."

Gloria was sufficiently nice to detest this kind of

compliment. She did not giggle as other girls might have done; she only looked at Vancohn with wide-open clear eyes, and ignored it.

But Mr. Vancohn felt no snub. He was far too conceited for that, and always had the idea that if a girl pretended not to be impressed, it was merely shyness, never indifference.

Gloria left early for the farm, and Mr. Vancohn returned the same day to Johannesburg.

Now Mr. McGreedy, the Managing Director of the Luilekkerland Diamond Co., was not a man who made a patient waiter, bullying those beneath him or crawling to those above, was more in his line, but to sit still and wait the pleasure of a Boer adventurer was not in his line at all, and he chafed greatly when after some waiting he found that Dutoit did not return, and what was more, did not even write and report his movements, or what progress he had made with regard to the purchase of the farm.

It happened that one day he wished to consult Vancohn about a legal point that had arisen with regard to the dismissal of a man in the mine, who held an unfulfilled two years agreement. Mr. Hillier had sent him a report of the matter, and before the next Board meeting, Mr. McGreedy thought he had better be in full possession of the legal aspect of the case, as there seemed to be a prospect of some litigation over the disagreement, and as he had to pass down Commissioner Street that morning he decided he would drop in on Mr. Vancohn instead of 'phoning him to come round to him. Next to the entrance to the skyscraper where Vancohn had his offices was a jeweller's shop, and Mr. McGreedy was looking into the window of this shop and deliberating in his mind as to whether his latest female fancy would like a bangle or a new hat, when to his amazement he saw Petrus Dutoit emerge from the doorway of the building where Vancohn had his offices. Dutoit even casually glanced at him, but without recognition, for evidently Dutoit's thoughts were elsewhere, and also he had

never seen Mr. McGreedy with a hat on, and this makes a good deal of difference to the face of a man or woman.

Had Dutoit come from the office of Vancohn, and if so, why? There were many more offices in the building, floors of them, and yet, McGreedy was quick to think and quick to act, all thoughts of the female fancy left his mind. He sprang into the lift and soon was whirled up to Vancohn's office. But no one would have guessed from his manner that he had been in any hurry when he entered Vancohn's private room, and casually remarked:

"I have just met quite a fine specimen of a Boer; those men run to height, don't they? I wonder what he was doing here?"

"A man with a beard, fairish, and dirty clothes?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that must have been the farmer chap who just left my office. Came to see me about a divorce."

Now Mr. McGreedy and Vancohn both looked at each other a shade too closely at that moment, and each knew that the other was lying. But they were fellow directors, and co-conspirators in so many matters, it would not do for them to openly distrust each other; to lie in wait for each other, that naturally would be their policy.

"Wants a divorce, eh. I thought Boers buried their wives. I didn't know they divorced them. Did the wife and the lover meet at Nachtsmaal, or was it the usual roller skating rink? How silly many married people are. I find it quite possible to be a married man and have my little etceteras also."

"And allow your wife the same privileges?"

"Naturally, we are the best of friends, and we each have our other dear friends also. Why my wife is quite a good-natured sort; she even sent a wedding present to the little French friend of mine who got married recently."

"That is being amiable with a vengeance."

"Well, I don't interfere with her, no matter for how long a period her motor trips last. What have

you been up to lately, anything very interesting? "

" Yes, besides this divorce case with the farmer chap you saw, I have a very delicate one of blackmail on hand."

" Is she pretty? "

" Very. The usual letters, you know; written during a seaside fit of madness while away from her husband, who, by the way, she seems genuinely fond of. There are two children also she doesn't want to part with."

" And the lover? "

" Blackmails her; asks for a cool hundred for the letters."

" So she came to you? "

" Yes."

" And? "

" Oh. I took a hurried visit to Durban to meet him, when he expected to meet her. I threatened him with five years for blackmail; got the letters."

" And have them still? "

" Of course; they are in safe keeping with me. I shall charge two hundred, but I shall be kind, she can pay in instalments."

" And you? "

" Keep within the law, the two hundred will naturally be expenses should enquiries be made; but they won't."

" Because the lady——? "

" Is very pretty."

" So you get a mistress and your fees, yet still keep within the law! You are a corker Vancohn, a fair corker."

" Not worse than half the lawyers in Johannesburg. I could tell you some funny stories of my learned brethren."

" There are a few decent ones."

" Yes, the sort you visit when you want to secure the safety of your winnings, but refrain from sharing your secrets with when you are on the make."

" Ha, ha. Yes, that is true, that is certainly true. Now, I called ostensibly to ask you about an agree-

ment with one of the foremen on the Vuurklip, but that can wait a few minutes. What I really want to know is, cannot you help me to devise a plan whereby we can get more out of the purchasers of our diamonds? If only we could arrange a more advantageous basis. Now I have been wondering if it would not be possible to make a special parcel one month of nice stones, taking out a lot of the small goods and some of the dirty black and brown stuff, and call that an average month's production, and then sell on the basis of that, six or nine months' output in advance, to 'The Gem Produce Syndicate,' and the agreement once signed, all the rubbish could be added afterwards."

"Not at all a bad idea," remarked Vancohn, caressing his chin and looking wise as he added:

"But why not then, afterwards, take out some of the good stones and sell them separately?"

"Excellent, excellent, what a pity we did not think of it before. Fortunately the diamond sorter is a sensible sort of a man; he will do as he is told and ask no questions. A pity Hillier is such a stubborn ass; he has talent, yes, but is an ass so far as finance is concerned; no use suggesting to him to fa—I mean manipulate the averages. He would refuse point blank to do it. I would like to see the shares go up a it."

"So would a good many people, but I don't expect you have many left."

"No, I sold on the last rise."

"So did I."

The conversation then turned upon the matter of the employee's agreement, and as soon as that had been discussed, Mr. McGreedy left.

When he got outside the building he paused for a few minutes in deep thought, and then hailing a taxi gave the driver the address of a private detective agency, where a man, by name Mr. Slimkerl, could be consulted daily between the hours of ten and five.

CHAPTER XV

MESSRS. SLIMKERL AND CO. were people of experience and resource. Many and varied were the matters referred to them, and in addition to being employed by many private people, they were not infrequently called upon by the C.I.D.* to make special enquiries. It did not take them long to trace Mr. Petrus Dutoit, and one of their assistants being able to speak Dutch and disguise himself as a Boer from up country, soon struck up an acquaintance with him at the hotel at which he put up during his stay in Johannesburg.

Petrus Dutoit had the same failing so many of his blood have; he was conceited to a degree that is never encountered with men of his class in Europe. The nature of a Colonial born is peculiar; he so often makes up for his lack of knowledge by a superabundance of vanity. He has seen no other country, read so few books, had a very indifferent education, and if he possesses land and his father has possessed land before him, he regards himself as the tip-top of creation. Further, the presence of the natives adds to his feeling of superiority. The South African born cannot understand the gentle manners and polite charm of those from other lands, and if they fail to domineer over him, as he in his turn domineers over others, he thinks they cannot be of much account in their own land, and their quiet gracious ways mean that they are not only nobodies, but that they wish to worm their way into the goodwill of the Colonials they encounter, for selfish reasons of their own, for the South African born is not only conceited but also suspicious.

The chief thing for a detective to study is character

* Criminal Investigation Department.

Mr. Slimkerl was a keen student of character himself, and had no use for any assistant who was not; therefore, when the Boer from Waterberg encountered Petrus Dutoit he pretended to be a very green Boer, one who had never visited Johannesburg before, and, further, was merely a help on his father's farm, having no land of his own. Needless to say, Petrus Dutoit swelled with importance, and vouchsafed to show him round a bit, the result being that Dutoit got drunk, and under the influence of liquor let out that he had a big deal on, a very big deal, his partner being one of the sharpest lawyers in Johannesburg. This was all the detective required to know. Dutoit awoke with a bad head the next morning, and saw the ignorant Boer from Waterberg no more.

Then McGreedy made his plans, silently, without consulting anyone, least of all the Companies' solicitor, Mr. Vancohn, for whom he had a surprise in store.

The board meetings of the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. Ltd. were always held in the offices of the Company, which were also the offices of the chairman of the Company, Mr. Heinrich Veilchenduft, much to the annoyance of certain directors, who, being a little more conscientious than the others, would have preferred the meeting to have been held in some more unbiassed spot, where there was less likelihood of certain of the directors being "got at" first, and Mr. Veilchenduft could not have had his own way in everything.

These meetings were supposed to take place every fortnight, and the more needy of the directors, who relied upon their fees thus earned to pay for their lodging expenses, as a supplement to what they gained at poker with which to pay their living expenses, would like the meetings to have taken place twice a week, for they didn't last long, and the business that took place was usually arranged beforehand; indeed, dates had a way of being postponed if the conscientious directors were likely to be present, and one director of the Company, a professional "guinea

pig,"* was specially told off to find out their movements, and then with much-expressed regret arrange that the meeting should unfortunately take place when they had other meetings elsewhere, that is if anything of really vital importance was likely to be discussed.

Mr. Veilchenduft had been heard to say that he considered ten minutes quite time enough to devote to any board meeting, but he preferred five.

As a rule the directors who were boon companions lunched together at the Carlton Hotel on board meeting days, for the meeting was usually fixed for three o'clock in the afternoon.

They did not drink, so few financiers do, and the courteous head waiter knew each man so well that his soliciting their requirements was more an act of politeness than a necessity, for these men were constantly either feeding together, or feeding some other man, or as a rule being fed by some other man, or giving a party to someone leaving Johannesburg, or someone returning, or asking some other man's wife out to lunch, or having to take one's own wife to dinner, and it was always to the Carlton, until each attendant could have written up the whole front pages of the history of any of them in the Carlton family bible or rather visitors' book. In fact, two gentlemen of the financial circle had stayed so long at the Carlton, actually living there, that it was said the Government were considering the question of asking them to pay taxes.

When the directors of the Vuurklip lunched together they had two topics of conversation, money and women. The former included all the property of their acquaintance and the deals of the day, the state of the share market, and speculative speech as to the future possibilities; then from money to turn to women was not a difficult stride, and the latest belle from His Majesty's Theatre came in for dissection; also who was going to be divorced, who had just been divorced,

* A man who attends many meetings as a director and receives a fee of a guinea each time.

and who ought to be; for next to America, South Africa surely holds the records with regards to the bending of Cupid's bow, the poisoning of his arrows and the price paid.

And the men were as disloyal to each other about money as they were disloyal to the women they professed to adore, no more and no less. The two seemed to share honours (?) in their estimation; only if the palm had been given to the one more than to the other, the golden calf would have had the benefit of the additional worship.

A delicately complexioned doctor joined the group for coffee, and received a cordial welcome from Mr. McGreedy in particular, for Mr. McGreedy was more influenced by the medical profession than any other, and had been wont to say that if ever he were really a rich man he would have a doctor to live with him. McGreedy's valet had been heard to say that his master gazed at his tongue every morning before putting on his pants, and he ate and drank nothing without medical advice. He wanted to live long and to live much. Death was a bogey in the far off distance; these men sent wreaths to funerals, but never discussed death.

The doctor accepted coffee and a light for his cigar, listened to a naughty story, and then spoke of a rather bewitching mole on the shoulder of a woman they all knew; he would have told more in detail of any of his patients, male or female, to any particular friend, in private, even if about another friend; in semi-public he was a little more particular.

From women the conversation naturally flowed back again to money.

One man named Davidson said he must unload "Clusters," but he was short. Would Hunting oblige by lending him 5,000 shares? He knew Hunting had 7,000.

"Sorry," replied Hunting, "I sold last week."

"Did you really though? Then you were lucky, for they are going down; will fall again to-morrow

certain. Well, I must see what I can do, but I knew I could rely on you if you had them."

"Of course, old chap, you know that well enough."

Now it happened that after lunch a certain short, tubby man, who was known as McGreedy's spy, went down to the telephone box, and seeing Hunting enter the adjoining telephone box, he left his door open, and heard Hunting ring up his secretary and say:

"That you, Smith? Then run like hell and sell my 7,000 "Clusters." They will be down to-morrow, and don't say a word to anyone; if Davidson asks you anything, say they were sold a week ago."

Then he rang off, and the tubby man closed his door.

Such is the loyalty and the friendship of financiers.

At three o'clock the directors of the Luilekkerland Co. met at Mr. Veilchenduft's office.

Cigars were handed round. What the directors didn't smoke they pocketed. Then the minutes of the last board meeting were read by the secretary, and almost before they were finished, up jumped Mr. Veilchenduft and held out his hand for the minute book to sign, and said:

"Gentlemen, I take it that you agree that the minutes are in order." He did not invite discussion on any point, or seem to expect any. In fact, the signature was given before the secretary sat down. Before the ink was dry he, however, observed:

"Gentlemen, I will not detain you very long this afternoon. Has any one of you got anything urgent?"

Mr. McGreedy then bent forward and said:

"There is one thing I would like to say, and that is that I have made a very advantageous provisional agreement with a man from the Luilekkerland district whereby this Company can acquire another diamond mine, and need only pay half the ordinary price, as the intermediary thinks that I have to receive the other half, and I consider that in justice to the attention that I have given to this matter I ought to have a commission of ten per cent. on the business."

To attempt to describe the feelings of Vancohn when he heard these words fall from the lips of Mr McGreedy is well nigh impossible; almost his heart stopped beating, and his face turned more than a shade paler than its usual sallow tint, his long, thin fingers trembled and his nostrils quivered. Fortunately for him, the Chairman and Directors had their eyes fixed upon the face of Mr. McGreedy, who was opposite to Mr. Vancohn, the directors being seated round a long table with Mr. Veilchenduft at the head. Mr. McGreedy had not only given Vancohn both a surprise and a shock, but also seemed to sweep the earth from beneath his feet. Mr. McGreedy could not forbear from giving a triumphant glance in his direction, and Vancohn with an almost superhuman effort smiled back, as though the matter only concerned him as a director of the Company, and not in any more personal manner. Mr. McGreedy felt a supreme satisfaction in knowing that he had "queered the pitch," and, as he thought, spoilt the game of his fellow director, and supposed to be close friend.

After a little discussion in which Vancohn refrained from joining, it was decided that Mr. McGreedy was certainly entitled to a payment of ten per cent.

The chairman, Mr. Veilchenduft then suggested that the matter be submitted to the Company's solicitor, Mr. Vancohn, to see if the title deeds, etc., were in order.

To this Mr. McGreedy immediately objected, saying that so far he had only a letter, and could not divulge anything. He only desired that the Company should have the matter placed in the minute book, and to this the Board agreed.

The Board meeting then broke up, the directors not forgetting to help themselves to the Company's cigars as they passed out; in fact, in a fit of apparent absentmindedness McGreedy helped himself twice, but then he was so busy at the time trying to catch the eye of a pretty "typewriting" girl at work in the outer office, whom he could see through the now open door, that he surely was to be excused.

Mr. McGreedy walked down Market Street, and with him walked his tubby "guinea pig" known as his "spy." They had not gone far, however, before Vancohn joined them, and pleasantly taking Mr. McGreedy by the arm he said:

"I am awfully glad you have the chance of getting another mine. How soon are we to know all about it?"

"As soon as I know myself," Mr. McGreedy replied.

"Have you seen the new girl at Brewsters tea-room?" asked Vancohn as though dismissing the subject of the mine.

"No. Is there a new girl? I haven't been there for a week. What is she like?" asked McGreedy instantly interested.

"Not bad, large blue eyes, some pretty dimples, and carries her powder puff in her stocking. That hors d'œuvre at lunch was very salty, what do you say to a cup of tea now? I wonder why I ate an hors d'œuvre? Must have been absentmindedness. I am usually contented with a *plat-du-jour* and little else. What do you say?"

"Well, I thought of looking in again at the office. What are you doing, Tubby?"

"Oh, I must go on to the office of the 'Concentrated Naartje Fluid Co.' They have a meeting at half-past four."

"Well, look me up to-morrow."

"At ten?"

"Yes, or thereabouts."

"Good. I'll have the new prospectus of 'The Lead Bulb and Petal Works' ready by then."

"Right."

"Bye-bye." A wave of the hand from Tubby, and he was gone.

"Who is running Brewsters tea shop now?" asked McGreedy.

"Oh, a man who came out to do big game shooting up country. I understand he went on the boat at Southampton in full shooting kit, wore it the whole

voyage, practiced with dumb bells and punch balls to keep his muscles trim for carrying a 500 cordite, talked of nothing but elephants and kindred birds, and then went to Johannesburg to see a mine before he went on, fell in love with Mrs. Brewster, and has lived at the tea shop ever since. That was four months ago."

"And does he still wear khaki?"

"No. He has even shaved off the beard he was growing so carefully during the voyage, and carries a cane in place of his gun. Quite a knut. That is why a new girl has been introduced. Mrs. Brewster is too busy looking after her boy to see to mere men and give them tea."

"She's a pretty woman." McGreedy pronounced the word woman in the same way he always did money, as though spelt with a "u" instead of an "o." His voice was thick and his eyes always a little bleary, although he never touched alcohol. He said it excited him too much. It was well that drunkenness was not one of his vices; he lacked virtue in so many other ways.

They were soon seated in the little pink and green tea shop, and while McGreedy ogled the fair girl who waited on them, and said sweet nothings at which she giggled, and he looked her all over as though his eyes had X ray powers, Vancohn sat back in his chair and calmly stared, a smile upon his pale face, his long, thin fingers caressing his chin.

Soon she flitted away to another customer, and McGreedy in a very good humour, sipped his tea. Then Vancohn, with an assured air of cordiality and frankness, said:

"McGreedy, I have a notion from whom you received that letter about the mine."

"Ah?"

"Or wrote a letter at his request and gave it into his keeping."

"So?"

"And if it is the man I think, be careful; be very careful."

"I shall."

"The buying of a farm does not always go smoothly. Now I know of a farm in the Luilekkerland district. I believe you said your man comes from there. Well, the farm I know of cannot be bought without legal assistance."

"Yes?"

"You remember the little affair of the Government enquiry into—well, we will not mention names in a teashop. I helped you then."

"That has nothing to do with this."

"No. But I know rather a lot about that. More than I did at the time I helped you. Dreyer has been hard up lately. He came to my office."

"The cad."

"All's fair in law and love. Now, don't you think you had better tell me the name of the man you are dealing with?"

"And if I do?"

"We have arranged things amicably together before. I fancy we might again. I noticed you were not keen when our worthy chairman suggested this afternoon that I, as the Company's solicitor, should have all details placed in my care. I suppose you did not wish me to know, because you thought, or knew, I did know! Sounds Irish, doesn't it?"

"This man may have offered you the mine also?"

"Probably has."

"And?"

"He is a slim rogue if he is the man I know, and his idea was probably to play off one against the other."

"All Boers are slim."

"Not all. So he was a Boer! So was also my friend. Come, you had better be quite frank with me. You cannot lose by it, and you might gain."

"Dutoit was his name, Petrus Dutoit."

"Yes, I felt certain of it all the time. Now perhaps you don't know that the farm not only is not his, but unless I arrange to press a certain matter, it never will be. I know the man who holds the pincers. Only I can do this. I am not lying. It would not pay me

in this case to lie, but if I carry this through where do I come in?"

"We would halve the ten per cent."

"We would do more than that, my friend. If I arrange this matter, we must also halve the half of the purchase money you had made up your mind to get."

"That's pretty stiff."

"Not at all, considering that you can neither of you move without me. If you could, you would have got further by now. I'll bet a pound to a penny this man has not been near you lately?"

"No!"

"Of course not. Because he knows that only I can help him. Your announcement to-day was a little premature. If you are wise you will now let the matter rest until I have used the pincers on the people who still hold the farm and refuse to sell."

"Refuse to sell?"

"Quite so. Not from the point of view of avarice, but from love of the land, *that land has got to leave them* before we can touch it. Now halves with me, and I set to work, but I cannot move in the dark. You must refuse to see this man and leave me a free hand. You needn't be frightened. You have safeguarded your own interest by having the subject minuted. I cannot now bring forward a mine in the same district without suspicions being roused. That I grant. But unless I undertake the business there will be no mine for you either, and those minutes will be waste time. A pity, still they will not count."

"All right; we will work together."

"Halves?"

"Halves."

The pretty girl drew near and laid a ticket on the table.

"Do I pay at the desk?" asked Vancohn.

"Please yes."

"And you?" asked McGreedy with a smile.

"Oh, that's as you like, sir."

"Your nose is all shiny. Don't you ever use powder?" continued McGreedy.

"Sometimes," said the girl, and with one eye on the two shilling tip placed on the table, and another eye on the screen that divided the table from the next, the girl lifted the hem of her dress; it was not difficult, for she wore the latest cut-up-the-front pattern, and taking a powder puff from out of the top of her stocking, she giggled as she powdered her nose.

"I will come to tea again soon," said McGreedy.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. VANCOHN was determined to see Dutoit, and even rang up the hotel which he usually stayed at when in Johannesburg, but he was informed that Dutoit had left for Pietsrust. To Pietsrust therefore Vancohn decided that he would follow. A visit to Pietsrust was necessary for many reasons, the primary one being that he must get hold of the manager of the Luilekkerland Bank, and try and persuade him to withdraw the Bond on Clevedon.

Mr. Andrews, the manager of the bank, was not by nature a hard-hearted man, but like most of the men in South Africa, he was a man sometimes smitten with the gold fever, perfectly honest so far as the Bank was concerned, but speculative to the point of gambling with not only his own but also his relations' money. Vancohn had known him for some years, and on two occasions had helped him over nasty mishaps, which, had they become known, would certainly have lost him his position as Manager of the Luilekkerland Bank. He therefore was under an obligation to Vancohn, although Vancohn had lost nothing financially in connection with the business. Still, for a man to have a secret is for a man to hold a Bond, so to speak, over that man's position, and in silence lay the obligation. Men of honour would naturally say that there was no obligation about the matter, but men of honour would find their ideas changed and their ideals blunted if they lived in South Africa, where every man is for himself and the devil over all.

The meeting between Vancohn and Dutoit was not very satisfactory to the former, for Dutoit merely boasted that he had only gone to Mr. McGreedy in

order to force Vancohn to give him his promise in writing, and if he made any unpleasantness over the matter, he would send Vancohn's letter to the Chairman of the Luilekkerland Company. It really made no difference to him if he sold the farm to McGreedy or Vancohn so long as he got his share of the money.

Vancohn could see that Dutoit was already getting beyond the bounds of reason, and had better be carefully handled if any of them were going to reap any benefit at all. It was, therefore, useless to try and "bully" Dutoit, the best course to pursue being to flatter him and stand him a few drinks; in fact, although Vancohn stood to make far less by having to share with McGreedy, still there was some advantage in having McGreedy for a confederate, seeing that Dutoit was such a slippery eel and so cool a rogue. Therefore the meeting ended in handshakes, and Vancohn promising to see what could be done about the Bank, for Dutoit had told him with a wink:

"Aletta gave me a letter to post to the Bank a week ago, but, ach, I only posted it to-night. That will make the interest overdue, though it is my belief that also only half has been offered this month and time asked for the balance."

And even Vancohn, blackguard as he was, felt a little disgusted at the callousness of Dutoit's manner, for a Jew, if he fleeces the Gentiles or does down another Jew, as a rule has some consideration for his own family; Dutoit had none.

The next morning Vancohn called at the Luilekkerland Bank, and was at once shown into Mr. Andrews' private room.

After discussing one or two matters of mutual interest concerning the share market, Vancohn tackled the subject of the Bond. He gave no reasons as to why he wished the matter pressed, but hinted that a very big business might result, and it was far better that he should not disclose anything at the present moment, as then Mr. Andrews could act with a free conscience if he had not actually been promised a share in the profits of the business beforehand.

"But I would rather not do the Fairbains a bad turn if I could possibly avoid it," said Mr. Andrews. "I have known the family some time, and it would go against the grain."

"There, you are right," said Vancohn artfully, "and by withdrawing the Bond so that they may be compelled to sell, you will be in reality doing them a very good turn. Some people are so stubborn; they have to be helped against their will. This is a case in point. That farm, if they cling to it, will be a mill-stone round their necks. They can't keep it going much longer; they had better sell before they fail altogether. I can tell you, my dear Andrews, the farm is not any too good security as it stands."

"And yet?"

"That we need not go into. They could do nothing if the farm remains with them. As I said before, there are details you need not, in fact, had better not, know now, the essential points being that you will in reality be doing them, and incidentally yourself, a good turn by withdrawing the Bond; also you will be safeguarding the interests of the Bank."

Vancohn pursed his lips together, and smoothed his chin. He was looking steadfastly at Mr. Andrews as he spoke. Mr. Andrews dropped his eyelids and looked down at various letters on the table; outside in the road a waggoner called to his team of bullocks; a fly buzzed in the window. One of those pauses ensued in which one hears the ticking of each other's watches, and with a weak character like that of Mr. Andrews one hopes that some interruption may occur so that one need not decide, at any rate not just then; but no such interruption came. Vancohn waited for an answer, and the Bank Manager, raising his eyes, coughed slightly as though to clear his conscience and his throat as he said:

"I received a letter this morning, a private letter, so I beg that you will not mention it. This letter came from Mrs. Fairbain. The farm is, as you know, hers, and she has to see to all the documentary business in connection with it, though, as you know, according

to Roman Dutch Law, a woman's signature is worthless unless signed 'assisted by me, her husband,' and then his name."

"Well, since law is my profession, and I live in South Africa, I ought to know," said Vancohn with a smile. He could see that Mr. Andrews was drawing out his information in order to gain time to think the matter over in his mind.

"What about this letter? You say it was from her?"

"Yes, and she writes very rarely; as a rule, she or her husband come to town and arrange about the money being paid first into her account for the sale of crops or cattle, and then she gives me a cheque. This time the interest is overdue. A very small amount lies to her credit at the Bank, and instead of coming in to pay, I received a letter asking if I will wait a few weeks for the interest. That letter, although dated a week ago, I only received this morning. Owing to the illness of my clerk who has charge of the loan accounts, the matter was not noticed the day it became due. The day before yesterday, however, the neglect to pay was discovered, and a reminder written asking for payment by return of post. They only get their post twice a week. She will get that letter to-day."

"And the letter you have received?"

"It has probably been lying in someone's pocket forgotten to be posted."

"So she will conclude that your letter is in answer to hers."

"I should say so."

"That is good. Now what are the terms of the Bond?"

"Six per cent. interest and three months' notice in case of the wish to withdraw."

"But that only holds good if the interest is paid up to date?"

"Precisely."

"Then as it was not paid up to date, you can demand the return of the Bond money."

"Yes."

"Then if you take my advice, you will not reply to her letter in any lengthy terms, but give a certain number of days during which time not only the interest but also the capital must be paid."

"This is the first occasion on which they have been behindhand with the interest. It seems a bit rough on them," said Mr. Andrews, puckering his brow. "Still, of course, I know the Head Office would not give any extended time for the interest. It is against their rules without further security."

"Most opportune that it should happen just now. You will, of course, not suggest additional security, and give as short a time as possible."

"What is the legal time limit?" asked the Bank Manager anxiously. He wished to help himself and others, hence he was not a successful man.

"I am afraid eight weeks, but they may know nothing about law. You can give some special reason for wanting it in, say, two!"

"And should it be known at the Head Office?"

"You will probably be praised for your careful methods, and if not, well, you need not mind. If this goes through, well, should you ever require any capital raised for farming for yourself, come to me. That I hope is quite understood?"

"You are very kind."

"Not at all. I am only just. One hand washes the other in this life. You will give them two weeks' notice?"

"Yes."

"Good. Then that is all settled. If you want other security on which to place the money when you get it, I can tell you of a very good investment."

"All investments have to be submitted to the Cape-town branch."

"Yes, I know that, but I can tell you of a safe thing to tell them about. It won't hurt you to be in a position to put forward something sound."

"On the contrary I shall be glad to do so."

"Very well; now I must be off to the Vuurklip.

The car has come in to fetch me, and is waiting at the New Hotel."

"Diamond market good?"

"Better than it was, but buy nothing till I give you the hint. Shares are the very devil unless you know just what to buy."

"And living near the mine, we know the least."

"Of course, the people in the mine don't know what the intentions of the financiers are. That counts the most."

"But surely they are guided by the yields?"

"Yes, but sometimes in quite an opposite direction to what would be expected."

Vancohn laughed as he said these words, and his thin nostrils quivered. He laid his cool, thin hand in the rather nervous hand of the Bank Manager, and then withdrew. The Manager looked at his right hand for a moment. He still seemed to feel the echo of Vancohn's handshake, and as he thought of those long, thin, cold fingers he said to himself:

"If that man had not been a lawyer, he might have been a forger, or a murderer, but always certainly a thief."

CHAPTER XVII

SOME people find a pleasure in remembered happiness, but others feel the present pain all the greater by reason of the contrast; yesterday's smiles are no antidotes for to-day's tears; the summer past is but a poor protection against the winter ahead, and trouble when one can conceive no possible way out of it, is as a wall of fog to a mariner with unknown currents beyond.

Trouble after trouble was coming to the Fairbain family, and, just as on that wonderful Sunday, life had seemed to sing so wonderfully in the sunshine, that one believed the song must continue for ever, so now a cloud so dense, so dark, had gathered round and over the farm, one could see daylight nowhere. Two of the horses sickened, although there were no known cases of horse sickness in the neighbourhood, and the symptoms were not the same; then the bull was lost and only found after ten days searching, when his body was discovered in the river, though why he should have left the cows and gone in that direction no one knew. He had been last seen late in the evening, quietly grazing close to Petrus Dutoit's cottage; what could possibly have attracted him, so that he should go to the river and seek to venture across—just where the water was deep, too, and the banks and bed of the river were soft mud. This meant a dead loss, not only of capital, but a calamity, for there were no bulls for sale just then and big fees charged for service; besides the inconvenience of having to send the cows away, and the boys' lost time in taking them. Then, as if that wasn't enough, another morning the gate leading to the lands was found open, and two teams of oxen had not only eaten quantities of the young mealies, but trampled

them down and done a lot of damage. They must have overeaten themselves, too, for all the oxen fell sick. Then, to crown all, the interest on the Bond on the farm became due, and there was not enough money in the Bank to pay it.

In vain Mrs. Fairbain appealed to her brother to return the thirty pounds he had borrowed. He had paid for an option, he said, and had not a penny left. Now he informed her that a man had offered to go halves with him in fruit farming if only a suitable farm could be found, but he had not a stiver, he never had a chance, etc., and so he started grumbling on his own account instead of listening to his sister. Then Mrs. Fairbain spoke to Gloria, somehow she felt she must confide in someone of her own sex. She knew her good-tempered easy-going husband would never blame her, no matter what she did, but he would hate Petrus more than ever if he knew about the last amount of money she had lent him. Gloria hated him also, but if she started abusing him, then her mother could stop her. Yes, there is some comfort when one is sore, in getting a good listener and one who mustn't answer back.

Gloria had no love of money or money matters, but she had, all her life, heard the affairs of the farm discussed in front of her. She knew the value of every thing and the best use to put it to. She was a dreamer in love and a worker in life, the best combination for a useful affectionate woman, and she fully realised the gravity of the situation.

"I can't account for that thirty pounds, Gloria," her mother said. "At least, I don't want to. Your father knows we are short, and, this morning, he said he would help me write a letter to Mr. Andrews when he comes home to-night, but he doesn't know yet how short. There's only eighteen pounds left in the bank, and we want sixty, even with the thirty it would not be enough, for there are some other bills must be paid next week. Ach, Gloria, if only I had some money."

"But Uncle Petrus ought to return some."

"Nee, nee, not Oom Petrus, not a penny, not a penny."

"I have six pounds in my money box, mother dear, you can have that and take that off the thirty, twenty-four doesn't sound so bad as thirty, does it?"

"Nee, Gloria, you are a good girl, you understand things and I'll borrow it for the present, but don't you say a word against Petrus."

"Ach, mother, I wasn't going to. There seems no good in saying hard things when one is bruised with bad luck. I don't even hate him to-day, he is just a black fate we've got in our lives and to see you sad makes even hatred seem silly and useless. I am glad you took Johannes to Roodekop Farm, he would be ill if he saw us to-day. Father went out this morning without kissing me, looking as though he wanted to walk, and walk, until he walked off the face of the earth."

"Tante Erasmus is a good woman and loves Johannes, the change will do him good, and I wanted him to go before he found out that Fairplay was dead; he loved that horse. Ach, Gloria, go and make me some coffee, this world is full of trouble, and don't forget the six pounds. I can say, too, I bought some things in Pietsrust, and bring the amount down to fourteen pounds. Petrus is my brother and I have a farm, the Lord be thanked. He, poor man, hasn't, his bad luck came before mine."

The farm had been her's so long and her parents before her and her grandparents before that, it never occurred to her that she could ever lose it, and so she wrote the necessary letter in conjunction with her husband, and had such faith in the friendship of the Bank Manager, that she thought the interest as good as paid, and in giving account for all the expenses at Pietsrust for Johannes and herself and various other matters, she mentioned that she had lent her brother twelve pounds.

"You may as well say given, as lent, Aletta," he replied. "You will never see that money again. It

isn't as though he worked well ever, he has done nothing for months. How he spends his time I don't know, nor what he is after, going backwards and forwards to town. That costs money and he earns none. Bothered if I can make him out."

"Ach, William, he has business with his option and may make all our fortunes yet."

"Well, since he does nothing and thrives on it, and, I'll bet, has a drink when he wants, and I work hard and get no forwarder, I think I'll follow his example. I'll loaf for a few days. The cattle's dying, the lands are spoilt. Gloria, for God's sake, give me some whisky and something to smoke," and William Fairbain kicked off his boots, and, to Gloria, it almost seemed that he kicked away his calm and resolute self at the same time. She had never before seen the expression of despair on his face that now darkened it, and many months passed before he lost that look of settled gloom.

When Gloria went to bed that night she said her prayers as usual, then added a few words more, for she felt a little frightened, though why she could not tell, and back to her mind came the memory of the lamb she had saved, and when at length she slept, she had a dream. It seemed that she was the lamb and lay all bruised upon the farm, in the little flower garden she had made, and, as she looked up, she saw the Lammervanger in the sky above her, it circled and circled round and round, and its face was the face of her Uncle Petrus; just as it stopped its circling and was about to swoop down, she awoke with a scream.

CHAPTER XVIII

PETRUS DUTOIT had always seemed the death's head at the feast, or, as little Johannes had once remarked, "When Oom Petrus comes in, my back begins to ache," and Gloria had replied, "Yes, Chappie, dear, it's like clouds without the blessed rain." Even Mrs. Fairbain was never her best during the time he was present, but wore a sort of aggrieved air, as though a slight to her brother was an offence to herself, and, what was worse, she always seemed to scent slights when none had been given, and was on the look out for future snubs.

But still Petrus belonged to the family, and, therefore, when the unexpected blow came in the answer sent by the Bank Manager, he was called into the family council. It was the only time Gloria had ever seen him smile, and she thought of caricatures she had seen of wild beasts with grins on their faces; she distrusted that smile more than she had distrusted his glum manner, still what was she to do? Her small voice counted nothing in the council, and her father seemed so smitten by the weight of the recent run of bad luck on the farm, that he, apparently, had no argument left in him, so that Mrs. Fairbain and her brother did most of the talking.

The idea that the Bond should be called in seemed incomprehensible, and that the Bank should require the money in a fortnight, unreasonable, to say the least of it.

"Ach, it cannot be just because the interest is a week late, and we have only part to offer, there must be more behind this."

"Money is tight and being called in all over the country," suggested Dutoit, quietly.

"And, of course, we have to be the first to suffer,"

said Fairbain with an air of despair, as though he had no intention of fighting against what seemed like fate.

"And what will happen if we don't pay?" asked Mrs. Fairbain.

"The farm will be seized," said her husband in a quiet, dull voice.

"The farm? William, you are mad. It's my farm and was my mother's before that and her mother's too. Take the farm! Why, why, I'd rather die."

"Don't, mother," said Gloria, and there was a sob in her voice. "Don't."

"The farm seems to be leaving us even if the Bank doesn't step in, least ways, the farm stock. There are two more oxen dead," said Fairbain, and he looked out through the window with eyes wide open, yet seeming to dream.

"The Bond is only for two thousand and the farm is worth six," said Mrs. Fairbain.

"Wouldn't fetch three in a quick, forced sale," said Petrus. "Wrong time for selling, money short everywhere."

"But they can give us only two weeks notice? Perhaps they must give us longer, only the Bank may think we shall hurry more if they say only two," urged Gloria, and her uncle cursed her in his heart, so afraid was he that they might cling to this idea, but he need not have feared, despair had clutched the vitals of William Fairbain, and he had no moral or physical courage left.

"Well, I've done my best in this rotten country," he said, "and, it seems to me, you would have been better off, Aletta, if I'd kept out of it, nature didn't intend me for a successful farmer, or anything else that I know of. I'll be blamed if I know what I am fit for, and yet I've worked hard enough."

"We all know that, father dear, it isn't your fault, father, is it, mother?" Gloria patted her father's arm.

"No, William, ach, whose fault is misfortunes

ever? It's like 'blue tongue' or 'scab' or any other disease, it comes and the devil sends it."

"But two weeks," said Gloria, "I don't believe it can be legal."

"What would it matter if it were three or four or even more, we couldn't find the money, who's to lend it?" asked Fairbain.

"Nothing would sell well now, either, the farm's got a bad name, and you couldn't sell the harvest in advance if you tried," said Dutoit.

"And even if we could, it would be a long way short of what we want. May as well try and raise money on your hat, Petrus," said Fairbain, glancing at the greasy felt abomination that lay on the table.

"Don't be personal, William," said his wife, "a hat doesn't matter, what's come over you, can't you say anything sensible? The farm, the—the——"

But Mrs. Fairbain could get no further, she threw her thick, white apron over her head and began to cry. Great sobs shook her fat shoulders and she swayed to and fro. She had no knowledge of how a "lady" would grieve, all affectation sped away in the face of real grief, she was a real Boer woman at that moment, and the loss of land to a Boer is like the loss of a beloved life to anyone else.

Gloria rose from her chair and went to her mother and laid her arms around her. William Fairbain would have done that, and more, had his brother-in-law not been present, but he rarely showed emotion in front of him, and never was sentimental or bestowed any outward signs of affection when he was near. He hated his brother-in-law, and yet had never come to actually quarrelling with him.

Now he looked away from the weeping woman, the muscles round his mouth twitched nervously, and his hands trembled, but he looked away from his wife, out past the garden to the space of veld and then on to the western sky, where soon the sun would set in glory, and back to his mind came the memory of that wonderful sunset when Gloria was born. How different life seemed to-day, the hope of youth had fled,

manhood had accomplished little, the future? He shivered and looked towards the west no more.

"It would be a pity for the farm to go to strangers."

The voice of Dutoit was speaking and Gloria looked at him with a quick, angry flash of her bright eyes.

"Strangers?"

Down came the apron from Mrs. Fairbain's face.

"Strangers to live on my farm? ach, Petrus, you're mad, never."

"Yes, you are right, Petrus, it would be a pity," said Fairbain, and this time there was a sneer in his voice.

"You wouldn't have such a soft job then, would you?" he continued.

Gloria glanced from one to the other, and thought to herself, "Oh, what is the use of quarrelling now? it will avail nothing," but she held her peace. There are times when words kindle anger as matches make flames.

For a second an ugly gleam came into Petrus Dutoit's eyes, and then he smiled again and looked at his sister, as though in this question of the farm, William Fairbain didn't count.

"Still, I say, it would be a pity," he said.

"Ach, Petrus. Are you a fool or have you two thousand pounds?" asked his sister.

"No, I haven't, but I know a man who has that, and more."

"To lend on Bond?"

"No, he wouldn't do that, but he's offered me a partnership if I can find him a small farm for fruit growing; this would suit him, because of the water."

"Well, and if he wouldn't lend on Bond, and it's a pity for the farm to go to strangers, what are you talking round? Ach, I can't see daylight." And Mrs. Fairbain looked inclined to howl again, but before she could throw her apron over her head, her brother said:

"This man wants to be a sleeping partner, he has relations he wants to keep out of knowing about the

matter, he is a bit mean and wants to keep his money to himself. If we take a farm together, he will take it in my name and then we make out a private agreement. Why, Aletta, if I could get the money that way and you'd sell to me, then you might get the farm back someday, and, anyhow, it would stay in the family and we'd save our pride."

"Then why couldn't he come in now and grow his fruit, and let the farm be in mother's name still?" asked Gloria. "If it's a sleeping partnership he wants, I don't see how the name matters."

"Oh, but it would, he would stay here sometimes, and, of course, I should have to live here to superintend matters."

"You live here?" It was Gloria who asked.

"Ja, Gloria."

"But there's no room," said Mrs. Fairbain.

"There will be less room still for relations if the farm goes to strangers," said Dutoit.

"Ha, ha, don't you see it, Aletta, don't you see the joke, my dear?" It was William Fairbain who was speaking, and his laughter pierced the heart of Gloria more than any hard words could have done.

"See what, William?" asked his wife.

"Why, you and I and Gloria and little Johannes, we turn out and Mr. Petrus Dutoit he sets up house-keeping here. Ha, ha, well I'm damned."

"Of course, you would rather sell to strangers," said Dutoit, keeping his temper.

"And who is the man?" asked Fairbain, rising from his seat and coming to the side of his wife.

"That I cannot say."

"And you're sure it's fruit farming? No trick to turn up the ground and get options and all that tomfoolery?"

"No, it's fruit right enough, and it would be something to keep the farm in the same name it's been for generations, always a Dutoit on the land. Isn't that so, Aletta?" and Petrus appealed to his sister.

"Ach, ja, that's so," said Mrs. Fairbain.

"And someday you might buy it back," said Dutoit.

"I don't know the likely date," said Fairbain, bitterly.

"What price could you get, Petrus?" asked his sister.

"Well, if it's put into the market it won't fetch three thou at a rushed sale. I might get three thousand five hundred, that's about the price my man wants to give. Don't you see, Aletta, you could pay off the Bond, and then with what you would sell on the farm, raise a few hundred, and then have nigh on two thousand in cash, or a bit over, and no worry."

"But where would we live? I've always lived here."

"Oh, that you could settle afterwards, the thing is to get over this trouble now, and not let the farm go to strangers," said Dutoit.

"William, what do you think?" asked Mrs. Fairbain turning to her husband.

"Don't ask me, it's your farm. I'll find some work to do, I suppose. I'll keep my wife and children without the help of anyone. There's work in the world somewhere. Do as you like, Aletta, it's your farm."

And, turning quickly away, William Fairbain strode from the room, the Colonial woman did not detain him, she had no imagination, she thought him a little surly and more than a little unsympathetic. Gloria knew better, she was well aware what her father was feeling, and she longed to join him, and walk with him holding his hand and silently understanding, but she did not move from her mother's side, for she felt it would not do to leave Uncle Petrus as the complete victor in the field. Petrus Dutoit living in their house in their place! She knew what her father was feeling, and her heart ached with pity as she glanced towards the window, and saw her father with bowed head walking towards the west.

"If you can get the money at all, I don't see why you can't get it and still mother keep the farm," said Gloria. "If you loved mother, you would."

"Ach, don't be a baby, Gloria, you can't sell a farm and keep it," said her uncle.

"But you have no money of your own, so why should you have it? There's something I don't understand," persisted Gloria.

"You're only a girl, you wouldn't," said Dutoit in a tone he would not have dared to use had Gloria's father been present, but all Mrs. Fairbain's thoughts were wrapped up in the farm, and Dutoit started to speak to her in a soft cunning manner.

"It isn't as though I wasn't your brother, Aletta, and, who knows, the man may get tired of the place and not come often. He's rich enough to live where he likes, and then, don't you see, it would be like home again for you to come here sometimes and, of course, if I'd any luck, and my luck must come some day, I'd pay him out and give the place back to you. Then there's little Johannes, of course I'd leave all I got to him and my share in the partnership, and the farm would again be his when I am dead, for I've no children."

Gloria watched her uncle, and she remembered her dream. Who would rescue the lamb this time? And her thoughts flew to her lover. How good he was, how strong, poor now, but someday he must be a great man, her love endowed him with imaginary talents, and she thought he must get money enough to restore the farm to her mother some day. Yes, stories always ended that way: the lover always got the lost palace back, or found the papers, or brought the villain to book, and all this happening now must surely be like a story. It was so out of the usual running of their hitherto peaceful lives. Then her dream passed swiftly, and she looked at the fat broad face of her mother, and heard her saying:

"Ach, Petrus, but you will marry and have children of your own."

"Not me, nee, nee, Aletta, I'm not that sort, a

bachelor's life for me. Well, what do you say, shall I try and keep the farm in the family?"

"Ja, Petrus, that's what must be done; no one need know then, need they?"

"Well, what would it matter if they did, from you to me wouldn't seem the same as though a stranger got it?"

"And you are certain it can be done, and in your name?"

"Ja, I may even get three thousand six hundred, but you'd have no objection to my keeping the hundred, would you? It would start me better and you'd get the farm back all the sooner, and I deserve that for my trouble."

"What's a hundred when the farm has to go? Ach, Petrus, you know your welcome to that, and more if you can keep it in our family."

"You can count on me," said Petrus. "Now, you first write me a letter saying you will sell to me."

"Where's William? Gloria, go and fetch your father," said Mrs. Fairbain.

"No need," said Petrus, "that's only a formality just for me to show my man that you mean business and bring him up to the scratch. The money's got to be found in a fortnight, it will be a big job but I know he will do it, he must have money handy, for he said he would like to send to Pickstones at once for price lists of trees, if only he could hit on the right farm, he mentioned this one, but I said then it wasn't for sale, and he said: Well, it was rather too far from a station for his liking, still if I get at him now I may talk him round. Yes, after all, perhaps, it would be better to have it all ship-shape like, so while I put the letter together just you go, Gloria, and get your father. Yes, you are right, Aletta, I had forgotten it wants 'Assisted by me, her husband' at the end."

Gloria saw no use in her staying further, so she went to look for her father.

The kopjes in the distance were taking to themselves their purple veils of mist, and the sky east

and west was alive with flame-coloured clouds, the sun as a ball of fiery light was just dipping over the horizon, when Gloria touched her father's arm as he stood bare-headed on the veld, looking towards the west.

"The sun is sinking, my girl, going fast," he said. "There's only night ahead, my girl, for you and your mother and little Johannes. I can't keep back the sun, Gloria, and I can't keep the farm, I'm a failure, I'd like to go down, too, and rest."

"There's love left, father dear," said Gloria. "Love for all of us, and if, to-day, we feel the setting of the sun more than yesterday, well, dear, some day we shall feel more glad at the sunrise than we did this morning. Don't look like that, dad dear, it—it breaks my heart, turn your head from looking at the sunset and kiss me."

William Fairbain kissed his daughter as he had never kissed her before. It seemed as though he sought strength from his child, she was so young and yet so womanly, so fresh and full of hope.

"There will always be sunshine where you are, Gloria," he said.

"And home is home if we love each other, no matter if we live on the farm or in a waggon on the veld," Gloria replied.

They walked back to the farm together hand in hand.

CHAPTER XIX

ON the morning when the sale of all the remaining stock, machinery, and farm implements was to take place, Gloria awoke from a dream of happiness, of flowers, sweet music, and a wandering 'twixt earth and heaven with her lover, to find herself on the narrow bed in a room almost bereft of furniture. She looked around at the bare walls where her own little pictures used to hang, the prints she had cut out of magazines and had had framed in the cheapest possible way at Pietsrust; the photographs, the nick-nacks of a girl's room, where were they? All packed and on their way to Vuurklip on a waggon drawn by oxen, and then, lest she should break her resolution of the night before to be brave, not only for the sake of her dear ones, but for pride, she sprang out of bed quickly and looked round the room no more.

It was very early, the dawn just peeping, as though with a veiled lantern, through the window, and as yet no noise of the farm boys disturbed the tranquility of the morn. Gloria washed and dressed hurriedly; she was greedy of time, eager to take one more look round the farm before the place should be desecrated by strangers and made hideous by the tramp, tramp, tramp of those who did not care. All the farm hands had worked late the night before preparing pens for the cattle and the sheep, laying the farm tools and implements together in one place, and the ploughs and sowing machines in another. The auctioneer, a genial, cheery man, had arrived, and was sleeping in the house ready for the morning. A sheep had been killed too and cooked, and a large barrel of beer stood on the kitchen stoep ready for tapping, and clothes baskets filled with loaves of bread were waiting ready to be cut up in the kitchen. Big kettles

were on the kitchen floor to be filled with water for coffee that would certainly be called for all day long.

"A feast of sacrifice," said Gloria to herself as she passed through the kitchen and let herself out by the door. She would not go any other way, for her father was asleep on a mattress in the dining room, and she feared to wake him; she dreaded the moment of realisation for him, the moment that she herself had just lived through.

Mrs. Fairbain had already left the house a few days before, and after first fetching little Johannes, had gone to stay with Mrs. Hillier at Vuurklip, where she had been asked to remain until the house she had taken should be ready, for Mrs. Fairbain had resolutely refused to leave the neighbourhood of Clevedon, believing as she did that the farm would really come back to her again, and it was not until the money had been paid, and the transfer signed, that she realised that not only were they to leave the farm immediately, but also that nothing belonging to them on the farm was required or could be left, unless indeed she liked to make a present of the furniture to her brother, and this she naturally declined to do. The business arrangements had been completed so quickly, that almost before she realised that she had promised to sell to Petrus, she found that the farm was his, and he actually taking possession. The buying and selling of property amongst her friends and relations had always gone much slower, but then, as her brother Petrus had explained, he had engaged a "slap up Johannesburg lawyer, none of your sleepy heads," and so one journey to Pietsrust with her husband had been sufficient, and there she had met Mr. Abraham Vancohn, who had in reality come from Johannesburg for the purpose of getting the matter through, but, as he cunningly put it, he happened to be at Pietsrust, and as Petrus Dutoit was a neighbour to the Vuurklip, well, he was always ready to oblige with his legal assistance, etc., etc.

Only when they returned to the farm and gave an account of the matter to Gloria, she remembered the

night of the dance, and how she had seen her uncle and Mr. Vancohn in close conversation. What did it mean? But she said nothing; the farm was sold, surmises seemed futile.

And then how quickly matters had progressed, with what an air of authority Petrus Dutoit had said he must have occupation of the farm and they must go as soon as possible, and as he then came to the house himself at all hours of the day, and hinted that his partner would soon require to visit the farm, and refused to know any of the former occupants for the present, and the boys were told that they must obey Dutoit as their new master or go, William Fairbain soon told his wife that he would stand it no longer, they must leave, even if they went to an hotel in Pietsrust, in which case what stock they still possessed would have to be driven in to be sold in the market place. But Aletta Fairbain would not go to Pietsrust, and so it was finally arranged that they should rent a small house just on the outskirts of Vuurklip. This house was the property of two brothers who had gone off to the Vaal River to try their luck at the diamond diggings there. Besides the house there was a morgen of land, so Mrs. Fairbain decided that she could at any rate keep a cow and a couple of horses there, and not be too far away from Clevedon. She had thought that some stock, at any rate, might stay at Clevedon, but her brother soon gave her an opposite opinion on that point, and after a few words with William Fairbain, which almost resulted in a stand-up fight between him and his brother-in-law, Fairbain wrote to an auctioneer in Pietsrust and told him to come out and sell everything. This was exactly what Petrus wished, as Vancohn had told him that they, the Vuurklip Co., wanted the farm only, and he should not advise them to pay any fancy price for anything left on it, the harvest excepting, which would be taken at a valuation, but as the cattle had spoilt most of the crops, that would not amount to much.

Most of the furniture, therefore, was on its way to

Vuurklip, the waggons having started the evening before, and Gloria and her father remained behind to see to the sale.

Gloria was glad her mother was not there, for surely it would have broken her heart when it came to the bartering in public of the farmstead goods, and she guessed that Mrs. Hillier had thought of this when she sent the kind little note, suggesting how nice it would be if Mrs. Fairbain could stay with her, so as to receive the furniture and arrange it before Gloria and her father arrived. The Hillier's house was only about seven minutes' walk from where they would live, and therefore Mrs. Fairbain had accepted the invitation, and was specially glad to do so, as Mrs. Hillier had said that Mr. Hillier, having gone to Johannesburg on business for a few days, no directors were likely to be coming down, and therefore little Johannes could be put up also.

Oh the freshness and beauty of that early morning. The air seemed to kiss Gloria's cheeks with a vivid greeting, as though to brace her up for the coming day; the pale opalistic tints of the early dawn, the turning of gray to pale rose and gold; how beautiful seemed the sky; could sun rise and set with as great a beauty elsewhere? That dark line on the left, the trees that marked where the river ran, would it hold the sweet secret of her being wooed and won, and welcome her again to the shade of the trees and the life of the waters in years to come? Or at some distant period would all be changed? Gloria felt a strange foreboding about the future. It seemed to her that she was not only bidding farewell to the farm, but that something must happen to sweep away even that landscape, the vast space of open veld; what could change it? She didn't know, yet the more she gazed and gazed, the greater grew the certainty within her that this view was her's for the last time. Behind lay her girlhood, so wrapped up in the farm.

What had the future to offer in its place?

And the cold of the early morning seemed to turn to mid-day heat as the voice of memory whispered to

her heart: "You have Louis." "Yes, yes," she said, in reply, "so the future cannot be empty."

Then she walked through the little flower garden she had made with so much labour, and looked at the soft moisture on the leaves and flowers, not a heavy dew such as England knows, but a gentle damp fragrance, which would go as soon as the sun mounted a little higher. She stepped lightly, but not so gently but the dogs heard her, and strained at their chains to be loosened. Contrary to custom they had been made fast for the night, as they had been trained to frighten away strangers, and a number of Boers having arrived at the farm the night before and outspanned to be in readiness for the sale, it would hardly have done to have frightened probable purchasers away by dogs. Gloria knew the dogs would not be likely to leave her side, but they were a little disappointed to find that there were neither stones nor sticks thrown for them to play with on that morning, and their efforts to make their mistress play, soon ceased; they looked at her with a puzzled air and with dog-like intuition soon knew that all was not right, and so forsook their gambols, and walked demurely by her side.

To the gate that shut off the garden from the road Gloria walked, and then down the roadway past the waggons, round which the horses grazed, having their legs hobbled so that they could not run away. The native boys in attendance slept beneath the waggons, and the farmers and their families were asleep inside the covered tent-tops of the waggons, for they had travelled in the Boer way, gipsy caravan fashion, bringing their beds and their food with them. Gloria had met some of the farm hands going to their work. They all said "Good-morning" to Gloria, and saluted her in the manner of their tribe, holding the right arm straight upwards.

It seemed that the morning was no longer Gloria's alone; others walked abroad and shared it, and the charm began to go. Soon the occupants of the waggons would waken, and then other men who had

slept in barns and outhouses, would get up and feed and water their horses, who also walked about hobbled; and the day, the dreaded day, would begin in earnest. Gloria was just thinking of returning to the house, when the sound of a motor bicycle stole through the air.

Could it be Louis?

Of course many other men rode motor bicycles, and it was more than likely that many men would come out from Pietsrust; some perhaps with a vague idea of purchasing something, others merely through curiosity.

Yet surely it was an early hour for strangers. But why should Louis come? It was not a holiday; he would be at work in the mine, or perhaps he was coming down just for a hurried visit, to say a few words of comfort and then hurry back to his work; or was anything wrong with her mother and little Johannes?

Gloria hastened her footsteps and went quickly down the road which led to Vuurklip, from which direction the sound of the rapidly approaching bicycle was coming.

The dogs looked up into her face and hastened also, but she had not the heart to take any heed of them, she had reached that stage when so many things have gone wrong, that any fresh occurrence is looked upon as necessarily adding to the number.

Soon the bicycle came in sight, and it was not long before Gloria satisfied herself that it was indeed no other than Louis.

When he caught sight of her he quickened his pace, and although Gloria really hated the noise of a motor bicycle, yet this special one was surely blessed, for it always brought her sweetheart to her. Soon he was at her side; the machine slowed down, he got off and propped it against a thorn bush that grew all alone by the road side, and then turned to Gloria.

"Don't touch me dear, I'm not fit, for I have hurried down. I wanted to get here quite early."

But Gloria impulsively threw her arms around his neck and asked eagerly:

"Is anything wrong with Johannes or mother?"

"No, dear; nothing."

"Oh, I am so glad," and Gloria experienced such a relief that she felt inclined to cry; the last few days had been a great trial to her nerves.

Louis Martino saw how her lips trembled, but he was too wise to take any notice. He only banteringly said:

"I wanted a day's holiday, so I thought I would spend it with you."

"Oh, but the place, Louis; it is so untidy, and I can't go out. I must be with father to-day."

"I don't want a tidy place, dear; I only want, do you know what? A basin of water, so that I can wash my face, for you look so pretty; it would be a sacrilege to kiss you without. Have you soap or a basin in your pocket, do you think? Or, if not, could you come as far as the river? I do possess a towel. It wouldn't take long. Do you think if you sat on my bike, so, and I went very gently, you could hold on?"

"Why, of course I could, and that path leads straight to the river in a few minutes; it is only a path made by the cows walking that way one behind the other, but I think it is wide enough."

"A native or a cattle path is just three times as wide as my iron horse requires. Come along."

They reached the river in safety, and the face was washed, and more than one promised kiss given, and then Gloria said she must not stay another minute, as she would be wanted at the farm. It was sweet to be there with Louis, by the side of the river, and yet a bitter sweet, for Gloria felt that this too was in a measure a farewell; the river would be her's no longer, for in her mind was a certainty that once they left the farm, they would never see it more. Again an expression of sorrow came into her face, and Louis said gently:

"Gloria, you are such a brave girl; this is a day for courage. Don't you think it hurts me through and through that I can't step in and help you all out of this bother? If only I had the money. You

haven't told me much and I'm not the one to ask questions, but there are rumours about, and well—if only I could do something. But I can't. I've got nothing saved, Gloria, except a hundred and twenty pounds, and an interest in some cattle. Not enough to help your folks, Gloria, I know, or I'd have offered it when I first heard. But it's yours, Gloria, don't forget that dear, if ever you want anything. It would help to set us up as a little start when we marry, with what I add to it month by month, but if you want it before, Gloria, well it's yours and, well, we will trust to luck to make more, if it's of any use to you now, or any time. I know I put it badly, but, well, you understand."

"Louis, dear, how good you are. I do indeed understand. I want nothing really. Oh, Louis, I don't know why you love me so, I don't really." Tears sounded in her voice again, and Louis kissed her quickly and then said teasingly :

"I don't know either, Gloria, for see, the sun is shining on your hair, and it shows up all kinds of hideous red and golden lights. Now if it was black, a beautiful deep black, like the hair of a pretty girl I saw last Saturday——"

"Last Saturday?"

"Ha, ha, you are jealous, are you? Well, yes, I went to Pietsrust last Saturday."

"But you didn't say anything about it when I saw you on Sunday?"

"No, you see I have my little secrets. Now guess why I went."

"To see the pretty dark girl," Gloria replied roguishly, looking up at him with a tear lingering on the edge of her long lashes. The tear was a tribute to the offer of his savings; she guessed that the nonsense about the dark girl was only to give her time to recover herself.

"You are quite right. I went to see the dark girl. I spoke to her even, and who do you think she was?"

"Some former Mrs. Martino you have been hiding in a cellar. I can tease, you see, Mr. Bluebeard, as well as you."

" No, she didn't live in a cellar, but in a wonderful jeweller's shop."

" A jeweller's shop? "

" Yes, Gloria. Do you know, dear, I haven't given you an engagement ring yet, and I thought somehow that perhaps if I gave it to-day, it would be something for you to look at if, well if you got the hump. It is only simple." Martino began to fumble in his pocket and Gloria watched him with wide-open eyes. At last the ring was found; a simple little gold ring with two tiny fern leaves formed of gold, holding where the stems joined a rather fine turquoise.

" Oh, Louis, how quaint and how pretty. I have never seen one like that before."

" Well, of course not. Queen Gloria must have a ring different from other people. Now let me see if it fits."

It did, and they both gazed at that wonderful third finger, the finger that holds the records of all that is most precious in a woman's life, the greatest of happiness or the dreariest of tragedies. After a lover's interval, Gloria asked:

" But how could you possibly know the size, Louis? "

" Ah, that is another secret. I had a little private conversation with your mother one day, and she lent me a ring she said you had sometimes borrowed from her to wear on special occasions. This ring, dear, is not a new one; it belonged to my grandmother, and the beautiful dark lady in the beautiful jeweller's shop had it altered to fit you. It came back to me by post yesterday. You really like it? "

" Need you ask, Louis? Of course I, well I don't like it, I love it. Now I suppose we must go back. Father will be so worried if he cannot see me. I suppose you are going back too, for of course that was a joke about your staying the day? "

" No, not a joke, but solemn truth. I have a special little job on hand at the farm, and I asked Mr. Hillier if I could have the day off as a great favour."

" I am so glad. But what is your job, Louis? I

am afraid everything has been arranged; only, of course, it will be lovely to feel that you are there; though I must look after the extra girls who are coming to give out the food. Oh, dear! how can anyone eat at a sale? But I think the people who will come will not have any hearts; only stomachs."

"Still I have a special job."

"And that is?"

"To break the neck of anybody who dares to trample on your flower garden; yes, or even steal one single blossom. They are your very own flowers, Gloria, and I shall come over and remove all I can on Saturday afternoon and plant them in your new garden."

"Oh, Louis, you know, that is what hurt me most; the thought of my poor flowers being trampled on."

"Well, rest assured they will not be, if I have to wield a sjambok on black, or white, or copper coloured, and now let's be off, or my job will be taken out of my hands before I get there. I know what sort of a crowd one gets at a farm sale. The Boer has no sympathy with the man who is leaving; he only fawns on the newcomer, in the hopes of borrowing something speedily."

"Well, I suppose we are Boers really, if Boer means farmer," said Gloria.

"Are you? Well, come along then, my little Boer maiden and borrow my bike."

So many people came to the sale, and there was such a bustle the whole day long that the time passed away very quickly. The greatest thorn in the flesh for Gloria was when her Uncle Petrus arrived, clad in a brand new suit of clothes and a new hat, a collar on, and a bright blue tie, as though he had come to a festival, instead of to the sale of his own relations' belongings. He even wanted a pink rose for his buttonhole, but Louis Martino, with a smile on his face and a curse in his heart, flourished a sjambok and cried:

"No, every blossom is to be carried away by Gloria when she leaves to-night."

Petrus Dutoit might even have insisted, but at that moment someone called to him, and Louis Martino thinking that discretion was the better part under the circumstances, called a picannin, and together they cut the flowers one by one, and hid them in a great basket for Gloria to take away with her.

Gloria had never attended any sale except a sale of cattle in the market square of Pietsrust, and she was amazed when she saw the way in which utter strangers seemed to think they had a right to tramp through every room, although the house was not for sale. Even the little room where Gloria had slept, and where her own and her father's things were placed in readiness for their departure, was rudely entered by a group of men with their hats on, and their dirty hands were ready to finger everything. In vain an old Dutch woman, who had been the children's nurse, said: "That is the room of the young missus; please come out."

"We've as much right here as anyone else, and we've seen others come in," a man rudely answered, and Louis Martino had to come to the rescue and lock the door.

The auctioneer had announced that he would ring a bell when lunch would be ready, but long before then the Boers stormed the kitchen stoep, and took away all the meat sandwiches that were ready, and demanded beer, so that the food had also to be locked up. While the women folk made a sitting room for themselves on the floor of the front stoep, and gossiped together, taking no heed of their children, who ran riot through the house and played games in what had been the sacred best parlour. Coffee was demanded by all at any moment they chose to be thirsty, and never a "Dankie" for the hospitality was received, taking everything as a right, and secretly glad that William Fairbain's reign was at an end; for the lower class Boer is not a choice specimen of humanity, as the higher class Boer will regretfully admit. But they have had so few opportunities for learning better, so that one must forgive them much; poorly

educated, with no natural love of the beautiful, and only the boundless veld to represent the world, the greatest pity being that their Predikanten,* who wield so much authority over them, are badly educated also.

And so the terrible day drew to a close. William Fairbain was tired out with standing all day in the sun, and Gloria had more than once to think of the ring she wore to give her courage to face the throng with cheerfulness, instead of running away and hiding till all was over.

At last, Louis Martino, of his own accord, gave the order to have Mr. Fairbain's cart inspanned, and when it was ready he whispered to Gloria :

"Get your father away before that last batch leave. All the business has been done. He will settle with the auctioneer when next he goes to Pietsrust. Get him away. Don't leave him to be alone with Dutoit; the brute is busy ogling a girl. Get your father away, Gloria; he has been in the sun all day, and, well the beer is finished, and they are starting on whisky."

"But father?"

"Is alright dear. Your father never drinks; never, of course not; only he's been in the sun all day, and a couple of whiskies might upset him. It would me; and then if he met Dutoit and he turned cheeky—well, it's best you should be off."

"And you?"

"I will stay a bit and look round after you have gone. Your father needs you to-night, dear; it's rough on him having to go."

"You are right, Louis. I will find father at once."

William Fairbain did not need much persuasion to leave. He was dead tired, soul sick, and weary of heart. He, too, had no wish to see Petrus Dutoit just then, so they drove away, and Dutoit did not notice their cart until they had passed him, and then he saw Corneels sitting at the back, his feet dangling by the side of a huge clothes basket packed high with flowers, and Petrus Dutoit smiled.

"Isn't that the Fairbain's boy? Must be their cart. Ach, they forgot to say Good-night to you,

* Clergyman of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Petrus," said a man near him. "A bit stuck-up, that niece of yours, isn't she?" asked a pretty full-blown girl, Dutoit had been talking to.

"Ja, but hochmoed komt voor den val" (pride goes before a fall). "Come into the house and drink."

William Fairbain held the reins, but his thoughts were not on the horses before him, but on the farm he was leaving, on the home where all his married life had been spent, the home now lost; and yet, through no direct fault of his own. Fate had been against him. He had worked hard, and until the one recent and only occasion, had been a sober man; drunk once, and yet Dutoit, who had all the vices of life, and none of its virtues, now stood in his place. Anger had sprung up as a flame, flickered and gone out; now only despair seemed to clutch at his heart with icy fingers. Two tears came into his eyes; they ran down his nose. Still he said nothing to Gloria, yet looked straight before him, but seeing nothing; the horses trotting mechanically along, they knew the road; again another tear fell, and he slipped the reins into his left hand, and brushed the back of his right hand across his eyes.

"Father dear, you are tired," said a gentle voice at his side. "Let me drive," and Gloria took the reins from his hands.

"It isn't my fault, Gloria, all this, it isn't," he said in a choking voice.

"Of course not, father dear; we all know that. It's just—well, I was going to say a wicked word for the first time in my life, but I won't. Don't talk about anything, daddy dear, and, no I'm not looking, the sun does get into one's eyes just as it thinks of setting, and makes one, makes one look like crying, only of course I know you are not, you are too brave. Just slip your hand into my jacket pocket, dad; you'll find some baccy and matches there. I thought you might like them, and just smoke. I'll drive home."

"Home, Gloria? Home?"

"Yes, dad; mother and Johannes will be there, so it must be home," said Gloria.

CHAPTER XX

GOOD news sometimes travels so slowly that it has often arrived a week, a day, or even an hour *too late*; while that which is laden with disappointment or sorrow, seems to find so many messengers eager to carry, that the evil tidings are in our midst almost as soon as cruel fate has given them birth.

The Fairbains seemed hardly to have left the farm before everyone knew that the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. had bought it. No one could tell who started the rumour, and the Fairbains laughed when they heard it, concluding it was merely Pietsrust gossip; for of course they knew to the contrary that the farm had been bought by Petrus Dutoit and his sleeping partner for fruit growing, and they did not give the rumour another thought.

Some days passed, and then one day when Gloria was returning late in the afternoon from paying a visit to a neighbouring farm, and the Cape cart and two horses which they had retained from the sale had reached Vuurklip boundary, something went wrong with the harness, and while Corneels, who had not left their service, was attending to it, King Snyman happened to be passing by, and to Gloria's annoyance, came up to her and wished to be friendly. She had never forgiven him his behaviour at the dance, and always tried to avoid him. He was now in his working clothes, having apparently just come from the mine, and Gloria, ignoring his outstretched hand, busied herself by examining the harness, and very curtly bade him "Good-evening."

"So, Miss Fairbain, we are neighbours now," he said, ignoring her snub. "That is nice. Will you let me drive you round the kopje one night? It is

pretty by moonlight, and girls like moonlight, don't they? "

"Probably, but my evenings are engaged, Mr. Snyman," Gloria replied.

"With Martino? "

"That is no business of yours. Please do not let me detain you."

"Ach, you're not detaining me. Detaining! What fine words you use, but they suit you, for you are a fine girl yourself. Ach, now you're blushing. I knew I should please you by that. Come, why can't you and me be friends? You don't like me because you happen to see me in my working clothes. Well, Martino gets a bit of dirt on him too. We don't always wear black clothes or white waistcoats, you know."

"I should hope not," said Gloria, "or the mine would soon close down, I should imagine. Now Corneels, have you nearly finished? "

"Ja, missus," replied Corneels, it being the custom for a native always to say "yes" if true or not.

"You are in a big hurry to be off," said Snyman, looking at Gloria with hungry eyes. For this was the golden time of the day, the time when Gloria always looked her best and the glorious colours in the sky seemed part of herself. She had discarded her hat and a green veil of chiffon held her hair securely, without hiding it. She wore a simple white frock and a green waist belt, also a touch of green ribbon at her collar, which was low, allowing the fine lines of her neck to be seen. Her body was slender, yet straight in the back, and the gentle outlines of her bosom told of youth and beauty. She was, indeed, a dainty morsel of humanity, neither tall nor short, yet seeming to suggest strength and power of spirit and body.

King Snyman feasted his eyes upon Gloria, although she gave him no heed and was half-turned away from him. She hated to look into his eyes. Passion in a man's face seems so insulting to a girl who is not attracted.

"If you had hearkened to me, Gloria, you needn't have sold the farm. I have money, I'd have helped your people. What good is young Martino to you? He hasn't a bob, never will have. You think he is faultless, I suppose. Oh, I know all about you and him."

"If that is so, then there is nothing further to be said." Gloria spoke with dignity.

"But I'll overlook your carrying on with him if you will chuck him now. Listen. He will never be any good to you; he's daft. Why, if I had the run of your farm like he has had I'd have been cute enough to stop Petrus Dutoit's game. How comes it that he and not you get the money?"

Still no reply from Gloria. She only turned her head further away, and made as though she would ascertain what Corneels was doing the other side of the off mare. He seemd to be a long time mending the harness. King Snyman began to feel that mingled with his love for Gloria was hatred of her contempt. He determined to rouse her to anger if she would not warm to smiles. So drawing nearer to Gloria, he said :

"But perhaps your friend, Mr. Louis Martino, is standing in with Petrus Dutoit? Perhaps he put him up to the fact that there is a mine on the farm and is sharing with him the money the Luilekkerland Co. have paid Dutoit?"

"There is no mine on the farm, Mr. Snyman, and my uncle has received nothing from the Luilekkerland Co., and I wish you would leave me," said Gloria, her anger rising.

"Oh! so you haven't heard that there is a mine, and your precious uncle has sold the farm, and the Company have paid, some say seventy, others say a hundred thousand pounds for it."

"It's a lie," cried Gloria.

"No, it isn't, my beauty. Your dear uncle has been at Vuurklip to-day, and he has now gone to Pietsrust to spend some of his money. It is already in the Bank; he told us so."

"It is a lie," said Gloria, more quietly than before.

"No, not a lie; and my opinion is that your sweetheart told Dutoit there were diamonds on the farm. Now they have fixed it up together, maybe he won't want you any more. There are smarter girls in Johannesburg for Martino's money, but I'm not that sort. I'd stick to you, Gloria, though you've been swindled out of the farm. Come, tell me what is your answer?"

Gloria, while she had been listening the last few minutes, had casually picked up the whip out of its socket, and examined a flaw in the handle. Now she turned, and swiftly, with the quickness of practice, as one accustomed to flick horses or cattle at near or short distances, she gave a double twist of the whip, and struck King Snyman across the face with the lash. It seemed for a few seconds to encircle his head, as though she was lassoing him, and then he was free.

"That is my answer," said Gloria.

King Snyman had stepped back in surprise at the suddenness of her attack, and the smarting of his face was nothing compared to the rage that surged up in his heart. He was amazed at the dexterity with which she wielded the whip. He knew his own strength. He had but to spring forward, and he could crush the life out of her in a very short time, but something in the courage of the attack of the small slender girl held him back. The second passed and was lost, the opportunity gone, for the horses, startled at the sound of the whip whizzing through the air so near to them, reared, and Corneels was only just in time to spring forward and catch them by the halters.

Gloria sprang into the cart and caught the reins. "Climb up, Corneels," she cried. "I am certain you finished that mending job long ago; you were only listening."

"Ja, missus," said Corneels, with a grin, and climbed into the cart.

King Snyman stood quite still and watched every

action of Gloria's. He paid no heed to the excited horses; he said not one word in anger or farewell. He watched Gloria as she drove away, her gentle voice calling to the horses to reassure them. He still looked after the cart when it had gone some distance, and a cloud of dust stung his eyes and filled his nostrils. Then he gently stroked his face where her whip had made its mark. A look of determination settled on his face, and he smiled when a cunning thought passed through his brain, and an idea was born at that moment that exhilarated him. It came as a tonic to his disappointment, as a salve to his pride, and, looking after the cloud of dust, he muttered:

"You shall pay, ach, but in a way you will never know."

A very short time elapsed between Gloria getting into the cart and reaching her home, for in addition to the distance not being great, the horses had not only been frightened, but also knew they were not far from their new stalls, for a horse soon knows the road to his stall, and once set his nose in that direction and he forgets all fatigue and is ready to gallop along; even South African horses are no exception in this respect, although they have not got much life in them as a rule.

And Gloria's thoughts were in galloping mood too. She attached no importance whatever to what King Snyman had said about her uncle; all she realised was that he had tried to insult her lover, and she rejoiced with a feeling of exultation at the memory of her feat with the whip, for Gloria was no hypocrite, she felt no regret at that which she considered just punishment.

When she had reached the house they now called home, she gave the reins to Corneels, and he took the horses round to the stable, which stood at the side at a little distance from the house.

Gloria walked up the tiny pathway to the little stoep, and then, having reached the front door, she paused and gazed backward over the veld; the

shades of evening were quickly dispelling the light of day. In the distance she could hear the hum of the machinery at the diamond mine, and knew that if she turned her eyes from the space of veld she would see dumps of earth and all the hideous visible proofs of man's efforts to probe the bowels of the earth. Machinery high up, that it might search deeply below. But she did not look that way. She wanted to say Good-night to her beloved veld; and as she did so, she tried to put away from her all regrets that this was but a scrap of earth, compared to the vast open space with its edging on one side of river and trees, as at Clevedon.

Yet she sighed as she turned away, and a sense of unusual depression seized her; maybe it was only the reaction from her recent excitement, and yet it seemed to be something more, as though a heavy cloud had gathered over the house. She shivered as she passed through the doorway, and standing still a minute, listened.

Not a sound could she hear save the ticking of a clock; no lights had been lit, and the shadows gloomed deep and dismal after the light outside. It seemed almost as though the house must be empty, for Johannes usually came to greet her when he heard the noise of the cart wheels approaching. Her father and mother too, where were they? And what were they doing, since no lights had been lit?

Gloria turned the handle of their living room, the room they usually sat in when they were not on the stoep, and where they had their meals; not the sacred sitting room where no one sat, and which had again been selected, and dedicated to the harmonium and the family portraits and wedding and funeral souvenirs and such like,—but the general living room of the family, and she entered gently as was her wont.

The room was lighted by one window, across which the curtains had not been drawn, and a faint grey light came in. At the long table in the centre of the room little Johannes was seated; his head rested on his hands as though it ached, but his eyes were wide

open as he sat and gazed at the set face of his mother.

Aletta Fairbain sat in a big chair by the empty fireplace. Her fat body seemed to fill the chair and stand upright, as though kept in its fixed position by an iron will, her hands clasped the sides of the chair so firmly one felt the chair must break, and her eyes were fixed on the distant veld seen through the window.

Gloria paused for a moment and looked at these two; her mother with the grim look of an animal at bay, her brother with his frightened expression of vague incompetence to understand. No one spoke. What did it mean? One felt the tenseness of the atmosphere.

"Mother," said Gloria gently. But the woman in the chair did not turn her head.

"Mother, dear." And Gloria laid her hand gently on one of those clenched hands that grasped the chair.

The woman then turned her head, but slowly, as though in withdrawing her eyes from the veld, she left something behind.

No smile came into her face when she saw Gloria, and her hands still clasped the chair.

"What is it, mother? What is it?" Gloria asked, and her voice trembled. Then the rigid woman spoke.

"Go into the best room, Gloria, and take the portrait of Petrus Dutoit from its frame and bring it me here."

"But, mother."

"Go."

Gloria went. She unfastened the door of the sacred parlour. The lock creaked as though it was not often used, and when she entered, the stale smell of the unused room entered her nostrils and made her feel sick, for no window here was ever opened, so that no dust should spoil the frames of the portraits or settle upon the other treasures. The portrait of Petrus Dutoit was not in so massive a frame as those of the grandparents; it was but an enlarged portrait

and not an oil painting. Gloria found little difficulty in tearing away the paper that had been pasted over the back, and soon held the photograph in her hand separated from glass and frame. She did not look closely at the picture of the man she hated; she had no wish to see even this representation of him; and as her fingers tore the paper away, her heart seemed like a piece of cold stone in her side. Why had her mother asked for this? Could that which King Snyman had said be true? Had Petrus Dutoit sold the farm to be used as a mine?

When Gloria returned to the living room, she found little Johannes still gazing piteously at his mother, yet not speaking, watching her helplessly as a dog might. The big woman still sat rigidly in her chair, and her eyes were fixed on the door watching for Gloria to return.

Silently she took the picture in those two hard hands of hers (one felt that the chair arms must have relaxed their fibre and breathed when she withdrew her grip from them). She looked at the photograph of her brother for one second only, and the look of concentrated fury on her face was a terrible sight to see. Then, muttering the word "Judas!" she tore the picture to shreds. Silently, without a word, her hands tore the paper on which the portrait was printed, and the cardboard on which it was mounted, and the pieces she then threw from her into the empty grate.

Gloria stood and watched her silently, as Johannes still watched her. The action of tearing the portrait may seem one of trivial revenge, but the look on the woman's face made it something more than that. She was tearing her brother out of her heart and out of her home. Then, when the last shred had left her fingers, she spoke again, but all she said was:

"Gloria, go and loosen your father's collar. He is on the floor of the kitchen, drunk. I don't want to be a widow before he has sjamboked Petrus Dutoit.

Gloria went quickly.

CHAPTER XXI

THE arrangements for the transfer of the farm Clevedon from Petrus Dutoit to the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. went through without a hitch, Mr. Vancohn transacting all the legal matters, for which services he did not forget to charge the Company his full fees, although unknown to any of the directors, excepting McGreedy, he had deducted his share of the purchase money—Petrus Dutoit receiving £35,000 and McGreedy and Vancohn halving the remaining £35,000 after deducting the original purchase price, viz.: £3,600. Mr. Vancohn had also wished to share the ten per cent. commission McGreedy had obtained from the Company for introducing this mine to the Company, but to this McGreedy would not agree, for, as he observed, "I get my ten per cent., but you can fleece them over the fees, and, being a director and handling the money, see that you get paid."

Anyway, they neither of them had cause for complaint seeing that they had each made a big haul, and no one of the outside world a bit the wiser.

The Company also were well satisfied, for as soon as the ground began to be broken up, it was found that a gigantic diamond mine lay beneath farm Clevedon.

Needless to say, King Snyman conceived a friendship amounting to the love of brothers for Petrus Dutoit, and began to scheme as to how he could possibly benefit a little by Dutoit's newly acquired wealth. When not at work on the mine he contrived to see as much of him as possible, for Petrus Dutoit still clung to the neighbourhood, and enjoyed showing himself off to the people who had known him as a dependent on the Fairbains. He kept, however,

out of his brother-in-law's way and never called on his sister.

The two men drank together in King Snyman's room at the mine, or they occasionally visited Pietsrust for a week-end together, leaving Vuurklip on Saturday after Snyman had come off his shift, and spending the night at Pietsrust, visiting the Bioscope with a couple of flash girls, and then getting drunk at one of the hotels, that is to say, Petrus Dutoit got drunk and paid, but King Snyman, although he loved liquor, for the present preferred to drink somewhat moderately, and only pretended to be drunk, for he had serious work on hand. In the first place, he was still busy with his illicit diamond dealing with Vancohn, in the second place, he wanted to "touch" Dutoit for a really big sum of money, and thirdly, he had a big scheme of revenge on hand for the cut Gloria had given him with the lash of her whip, which scheme embraced also the utter ruin of Louis Martino.

When it was found that the new mine was likely to prove of such huge dimensions, and the few stones found near the surface were reported to be of first-rate quality, then Snyman told Petrus Dutoit that if he would promise him ten thousand pounds, he would show him how to make another fifty thousand. Naturally Dutoit was at once keen, for so much was his conceit swollen at the success of his recent deceitful practices that he felt bound to succeed again, and the fever for wealth had come to him in even greater force than before, that which he had gained began to seem not enough. He, therefore, gave the required promise, and signed a bit of paper to that effect, and then King Snyman put him up to demanding from the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. the sum of fifty thousand pounds as discoverer's rights. The request came as a surprise and a bomb of disappointment to the Company, for the directors were hoping that they had come to the end of their expenses, and were preparing to arrange to secure for themselves ground floor shares which they could

advantageously sell to the general public at a big profit to themselves. Mr. Vancohn had the matter referred to him, and when it was finally ascertained that legally, the discoverer of a mine has a right to an undivided one-fifth part of the mine, then Vancohn was asked to see what he could do with regard to compromising with Petrus Dutoit.

King Snyman kept in the background and impressed upon Dutoit the necessity for not mentioning his name, but keeping him posted with all details, and coming to him for advice, and when Petrus Dutoit, in a burst of alcoholic confidence, told him of the letters he had originally received from Vancohn and McGreedy, but without giving the exact details of the contents of the letters, then King Snyman felt more happy than if he had just pinched a twenty carat blue white stone; for he saw before him a vista of long years of profitable blackmailing. However, he advised Dutoit not to be in too great a hurry, but to gently hint to Vancohn that unless all he demanded for the discovery rights should be forthcoming, then he, Petrus Dutoit, would show the letter he had of Mr. Vancohn to his fellow directors.

King Snyman thought nothing of plotting against Vancohn, the man who really was his own partner. He had no compunction even at the idea of arranging a trap to rob that partner. But then King Snyman lived in South Africa, and in South Africa there is no honour among thieves.

When Petrus Dutoit called upon Mr. Vancohn with regard to the matter of the discovery, he was told by Vancohn that he would help him to get the money from the Company if he would return him his letter. This Dutoit refused to do, and so for a few days the matter remained in abeyance, neither wishing to give in, and yet both knowing that they had much to gain or lose in the matter.

In the meantime it became known at the mine that Dutoit was claiming discovery rights, and Louis Martino, who heard about it, spoke to Gloria on the subject.

"It is useless to even mention the subject to father," she said, as one evening they strolled round the kopje near the mine together. "Father gets into such a terrible rage if ever the name of Oom Petrus is mentioned, and then, well you know, father was always a sober man, but this trouble has altered him so; and when he broods over things he now takes more whisky than he should. It is all so horrible, and to me seems so feeble to add disgrace to disaster," and Gloria flushed with shame.

"Never mind, dear, you cannot help that," said Martino kindly. "Your father is a splendid fellow Gloria, only a bit knocked over just now, and I am not surprised. I heard to-day that Mr. Hillier is going to give him a job as timekeeper."

"Yes, is he not kind? Mrs. Hillier says it will not be hard work, and of course we cannot live on the interest of the money left over from the sale of the farm after the bond was paid off. That will pay the rent, and keep the boys for the cow and horses, etc., but the 12/6 a day father will earn will be very useful and give him an interest in life. He starts to-morrow, and so I feel all the more I don't want him unsettled by doing anything with regard to these discovery rights."

"Yes, dear, I understand you, but at the same time I don't believe your uncle is entitled to these rights. How and when did he discover the mine? It couldn't have been after he bought the farm, for I have heard that he really bought it for the Vuurklip people. His buying it was a blind. I am convinced of that, so how did he know there were any diamonds there? Did your father allow him to prospect?"

"Never; father would not allow anyone to prospect, mother was so dead set against it. Why, we turned away heaps of people who came. I will tell you one day about a contract some people had the impudence to bring. No, I am quite certain no one had permission to prospect."

"Well, if Dutoit prospected without permission, he disobeyed the law, Gloria. I'm certain of that,

though in what way he could be punished, or who would then get the discovery rights, I do not know."

"Then what is the use of thinking about it?" Gloria asked sadly.

"The use? Why, who knows? Perhaps the discovery rights belong to the original owners. Oh, Gloria, how fine for you all that would be."

"I expect nothing fine can ever happen now Clevedon has gone. We shall never get it back. All I hope is that father will go to the mine and work and keep—well, you know—straight, and poor mother! If only she would be less stoney. She seems to have dried up like a river in winter. She never smiles, while Johannes, I think the sadness of everything will kill him," and Gloria, when she said this, let a sob escape her, for her heart was full to overflowing, with anxiety.

"Poor little Gloria; don't cry, love; you can't think how it hurts me to see you grieve."

Louis Martino put his arms around Gloria and drew her to him, and what a relief it was for her to weep out her sorrows for a few moments, unrestrained. Gloria was not an hysterical girl, nor often given to shedding tears, but she had so often to be brave for others that it now seemed almost a pleasure to be weak herself, feeling that her lover knew and understood, and would not despise her tears.

After a few minutes Gloria dried her eyes and said:

"Oh, Louis, how good you are to me. I don't know what I should do without you."

Then Martino said gravely: "Gloria, I never could be half good enough for you; but if only I could help in some way. Look here, Gloria; will you be a sensible girl and do something, You might render your people a very great service, and not let them know till afterwards if you are successful, and they won't get upset beforehand."

"What can I do, Louis? You know I will do anything, and if you tell me to do it, well, it's certain to be right."

"Gloria, you will make me conceited if you talk

like that, you little silly, and then I shall wax my moustache, and hold my head so high, you will have to get a step ladder when you want to kiss me."

"I want to kiss you? Oh, Louis, never, if you waxed your moustache. Now tell me what it is."

"Well, Gloria, I wish you would go up to Johannesburg and see a good lawyer."

"Oh, but Louis, why don't you wish I would get an airship and fly to the moon? No, you are not so very wise after all. How could I go? I have never been anywhere except to Pietsrust and Kimberley, and are there any good lawyers? I've heard father say there are not."

"Not many I expect, but I know of one whose word you can rely on, and who lives by his labour; consequently he isn't very rich. I think you might go up. Didn't Mrs. Hillier say once she would like to take you?"

"Yes, she did. But well, that was before the farm was sold, and of course I couldn't let her pay if I went now."

"No, but you could allow your future husband to pay, miss. Oh, Gloria, how funny that sounds—your husband—and yet it sounds rather nice, doesn't it?"

"I won't tell you if it sounds nice or not, for of course we are going to be engaged for years and years and years," said Gloria.

"Of course, until we both have white hair, in fact," laughed Louis, and then said seriously:

"Come, Gloria, what do you say to my proposition? You ought to have good legal advice, and first, yes of course before you go, could you not make some enquiries about the movements and actions of your uncle while on your farm? Have you any of your old boys left?"

"Yes, we have Corneels; he might know something, and I could easily find out where the other boys are now working. Oh, but Louis, wouldn't it cost a lot of money?"

"No, dear."

"But I should not like the idea of spending your money, Louis."

"How about *our* money, Gloria? Isn't the little I have got as much yours as mine? But if you are going to be beastly proud, well, I will lend you twenty-five pounds, and then when you are a millionairess you can pay me back with fourpence interest."

"But if I lose it all, and no good comes of the visit?"

"Then I still get you, and you will have had a visit to the Metropolis of South Africa."

"But wouldn't twenty-five pounds be too much?"

"I hope so, because then with the balance you might buy a present for a girl named Gloria I happen to know."

"Oh, but Louis, I couldn't."

"You wait till you see what real shops are like. You've never seen any, only the places called shops at Pietsrust, where all the things offered for sale look as though they got seasick crossing the equator, and arrived tired."

They had been walking as they talked, and by now had left the kopje far behind and were nearing the open veld, across which they must walk for some minutes to reach Gloria's home. The moon had risen early, and now shed her glorious light around, and Gloria paused a moment to look back over her shoulder at the view of the kopje they had been walking near.

A kopje is more like an enormous heap of stones than a hill; shrubs and trees of stunted growth appear between the boulders and wild flowers blossom on the hard gritty soil. Boom kopje was of large dimensions, and appeared to be almost wooded at one end, so thickly grew the thorn bushes and wild mimosa trees.

"It seems to shut out one's view of the world on that side," said Gloria. "I suppose we get so used to the flatness of the veld that in our eyes a kopje turns into a mountain. How weird it looks by moon-

light. I wonder if any ghosts ever appear between the trees."

"If so, they would be black ghosts," said Martino, "for we bury the dead niggers from the mine over there at the left side."

"Really? But I hope many do not die."

"Oh, no; a few accidents you know, and some enteric when the natives will insist upon drinking dirty water instead of the boiled water provided. They are a pretty healthy lot, especially now Mr. Hillier gives them kaffir beer twice a week."

"But who buries them?"

"Oh, a burial party is made up of the boy's nearest friends on the mine, and they go out in charge of a police boy."

"How sad."

"Not so sad as you imagine. Natives do not regard life and death so seriously as we do, and certainly feel neither pain nor grief in the same manner as white folks. The boys who go to a burial are rather envied as a matter of fact, for on their return each one gets a drink of dop brandy. Now, dear, if you have finished looking for ghosts on the kopje, we will be moving on. I say, isn't that Corneels going across the veld?"

"Yes; perhaps he is off to see his sweetheart. He is to be married soon I hear. Whistle to him and then we will ask him if he knows anything of Oom Petrus."

"Is he really a trustworthy boy, or do you think he would warn Dutoit?"

"No, you could trust him, he is devoted to us; besides mother is going to give them both a home when he is married, and his mother was born on grandmother's farm. He wouldn't work for anyone else. There are not many faithful boys, but Corneels is one."

Martino whistled, and the native immediately turned his head. He stopped in his walk and looked across to Gloria. The moonlight was very bright and shone on her. Corneels recognised his young

mistress; she waved her hand to him and he started to run towards them.

"Ja, missus, the big missus say I can go out; I come back to-morrow when the sun gets up there." Corneels pointed to the east.

"All right, Corneels, I am not going to scold you," said Gloria.

"Ja, missus."

"Mr. Martino will ask you a few questions, and you must answer him, but remember you are not to speak to anyone about anything you are asked."

"Ja, missus."

"Now, Corneels," said Martino in a gentle, kind voice, "just try to remember if ever you heard of Baas Petrus Dutoit or any of his friends doing any prospecting on the farm Clevedon?"

Corneels looked silly, and not knowing what to answer, grinned.

"Have you ever seen them digging or heard the other boys talking about him?"

Corneels shook his head and replied: "Ja, baas, nee nee digging."

"Have you ever seen Oom Petrus looking at the ground, the earth, you know, Corneels?"

It was Gloria who now spoke, and she looked down at the veld and bent and touched it with her hand. Womanlike, she was able to convey her meaning to the mind of the native by pantomime, while Martino had failed by questions.

A broad grin spread over Corneel's face, and he said eagerly:

"Ja, ja, missus, Baas Dutoit he take a long thin serpent and put him in the earth, and he bring up ant earth, very tiny earth, like sand, and he look at it."

"When did you see him do this?" asked Martino.

"Two times, ja, baas."

"Yes, but when? How long ago?"

"Ja baas, farm Clevedon baas, when Baas Fairbain lived there."

"Did anyone else see him?"

" I don't know, Baas. I had to go chase away cows in the night."

" Oh, so it was at night you saw this? "

" Ja, baas."

" Did he see you."

" Nee, nee, baas, I——" Corneels paused, not knowing how to explain.

" Never mind, Corneels," said Gloria, " it doesn't really matter. But what was the serpent like?"

Then Corneels began in pantomime fashion to show with his arms the length of the so-called serpent, and imitated the actions of Dutoit as he remembered them.

" Why, of course, he must have used a small hand drill," Martino observed to Gloria.

" Didn't you want to know what he was doing? I mean, did you look at the ground after? " asked Martino.

" Ja, baas, I took—I, I not steal, baas; it was only earth, baas."

" Yes, yes, and you took some? "

" I not steal, baas; I good boy."

" Yes, Corneels, of course you are," said Gloria, " and even if you took some of the earth that would not matter, if it was only earth. Was it Corneels? Don't be frightened, you can tell me."

" Ja, missus, earth; I think it was muti,* and I take in my pocket. Some day I show the witch doctor and I ask him."

" Where is the earth now? " asked Martino.

" In my box, my box at the home of the girl I marry."

" And no one has seen it? "

" Ja, baas, no one."

" What colour was it? "

Corneels considered a minute and then said :

" Like the hens Missus Gloria has; no, like mustard, no like both, but not quite."

* Medicine.

"By jove, must have been yellow ground," said Martino.

Then he whispered to Gloria: "Do you think you and I could have the cart to-morrow evening and drive to the place, and take Corneels along?"

"Yes, yes, I am sure we can," Gloria eagerly replied.

"Well, look here, Corneels."

"Ja, baas."

"The missus and I will drive to-morrow evening and take you to see the girl you are going to marry, but you must not tell anyone, and you must give the missus the earth you took; it is hers, you know, not really yours."

"Ja, baas."

"And here is half-a-crown, and since we will drive you to your sweetheart to-morrow, take my advice and stay here to-night. We will leave you behind to-morrow, if you wish, instead."

"Ja, baas, dankie baas."

"You can go now Corneels. I will explain to the big missus," said Gloria.

"Ja, missus." Corneels saluted and departed, this time in the direction of the outside room he occupied near Gloria's home.

"That is good," said Martino, as he watched him depart. "I don't want him to visit the kraal of his fair fiancée again until we go with him. It would not do for any witch doctor to get that sample of earth before we do."

"It will be full moon to-morrow night," said Gloria.

"I only hope your folks won't object to your going with me, Gloria. You are certain we can have the cart and horses?"

"Yes, that will be alright; no one cares to go anywhere or do anything at home now. Father will think we are going just for the drive, and mother will say nothing. Johannes would like to come, I know, but he will not ask me; poor little fellow, you have put his nose a little out of joint, Louis. He thinks

that I am not really his now, and he hugs a cat all day. He knows I don't like cats, and that is his idea of revenge," Gloria sighed.

"Don't sigh, dearest; everything will come right in time."

"Any way, I am glad, Louis, that you are so strong and well. How dreadful it would be if anything happened to you."

"Oh, nothing will happen to me, dear; I am quite alright from every point of view."

"Touch wood," said Gloria brightly, and she smiled. How impossible would have been that smile if only she had guessed what the near future had in store for Louis Martino, but our eyes only see the present, and it is well for our peace of mind that it is so. No one could stand the weight of the past, the present, and the future, at one time."

CHAPTER XXII

GLORIA obtained permission to use the cart and horses the following evening, explaining to her parents that Louis Martino wanted to take her for a long drive, and that they had therefore decided to go to Machudas Kraal, starting as soon as Louis came up from the mine at six o'clock, and then driving home by moonlight. Johannes looked at Gloria with big round eyes as she talked, and she knew he was secretly fretting to go with her, but he was a proud little chap and did not ask if he might go.

Gloria would very much liked to have taken him, late though the return might be, but she did not know how events would pan out, and Louis had impressed upon her the necessity for absolute secrecy at present.

"Ach, Gloria, do as you like; the horses are only eating their heads off, no one wants them," said Mrs. Fairbain.

"I am not likely to need them," said William Fairbain with a bitter smile. "I am only an employee now, Gloria."

"But not for long, father dear," Gloria replied.

"Who can say? I'm not so very old as years go, and disappointment doesn't kill, worse luck."

Gloria could not reply; she felt a big lump rising in her throat. It was difficult to always find a cheerful word to say in this dreary household, a home with hope blown out, the light of faith destroyed.

"When I'm a man I'll buy you a farm, father," said Johannes. "A boy at the store gave me a penny to take off my coat and show him my funny shaped back. When I'm a man perhaps my back will be more funny, and I can show it at a circus for shillings, like the fat lady in Pietsrust."

"Oh, Johannes, you wouldn't like that," said Gloria, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"No, I hate it, but I'd do it for mother or father," said Johannes bravely.

"I'll kill that boy who asked you to strip, if I catch him," observed William Fairbain darkly.

"Ach, Johannes, don't go to the Store again without me or Gloria; my son isn't a show. That comes of living in a low dorp instead of on our own land," Mrs. Fairbain muttered.

They had just finished breakfast when this conversation took place, and Gloria hastened to call the kaffir girl to clear away. It was becoming an almost daily battle now, the striving to say the right thing, but always hitting on the wrong one. This family, once so united, seemed unintentionally to be always hurting each other.

Mr. Fairbain caught up his hat and went forth to his duties at the mine, while his wife took up her accustomed seat near the window, where for hours she would sit and look across the veld in the direction where Clevedon lay, no word passing her lips and no expression on her face save one of looking and longing.

Gloria beckoned Johannes to follow her, and they went out of the room to the kitchen, where Gloria saw to the cooking of the food, and then she and Johannes stole away to her little bedroom, and there with slate and book she tried to teach him the little she had learnt at school. For Johannes was considered too delicate to attend the school at Vuurklip, where the children of the mine and of the neighbouring farmers attended. Like many children whose bodies are stunted in growth, he seemed to have not only an active mind but a passion for acquiring knowledge of all sorts, and Louis Martino had endeavoured to ingratiate himself into his good graces by giving him picture books and a drawing book and paint box, but Johannes, though he valued the gifts, still felt very jealous of Louis for having gained the love of his sister, his dear Gloria, who before the advent of Martino, had seemed to be all his own in reality, though shared a little perhaps with father.

At six o'clock that evening Corneels inspanned the horses, and Gloria drove across to the room occupied by Martino in the unmarried quarters. This square building consisted of twelve rooms, and made of course of the inevitable corrugated iron, stood in a row with five other similar buildings, not far from the men's Recreation Grounds. In front of the buildings were tiny gardens, where sun-flowers, cosmos and such-like hardy and easily grown flowers bloomed, and the road in front of the garden was sheltered on one side by pepper trees, and a few straggling looking bluegums.

Louis Martino, who had hurried up from the mine to change his clothes and have a wash, soon emerged, looking fresh and handsome, and taking the reins from Gloria, he called to Corneels to climb up behind, and they drove away, but not however before King Snyman, coming across from the mine, had seen them, and his teeth clenched fiercely as he noticed the blushing, smiling face of Gloria and the proud, gallant appearance of the man by her side. They also had seen King Snyman, but took not the slightest notice of him. He was to them no more than a snarling dog slouching across their pathway, and they soon forgot even having seen him, so happy were they in the companionship of each other.

To Gloria it always seemed that the bulk of her troubles fell away when she was with Louis, while he was happy as a man should be happy, with health in his veins, and the girl of his heart near him.

"Isn't it funny, Louis, when one is unhappy, one tries all the time to make conversation, but when one is happy it is enough to be just silent," observed Gloria.

"I suppose in the former case speech is exercise to blunt your perceptibilities. There, isn't that a long word for me to use? You will begin to think I have been to school lately Gloria. And when you are happy you are silent? Yes, it's nice just to be that and know you are near. Oh, Gloria, we are going to have such years of happy silence. Only, first, we must try and put things right for the rest of the world.

Your people's world, a bit. I'm afraid your father does not take very kindly to working on the mine. Now don't look anxious; you have a tell-tale face, you little silly. What I mean is, it must be hard lines to sit still for regular hours, when one has been accustomed to being one's own master. Yes, dear, your father is doing very well, I'm sure of that, only I am sorry for him. If only this idea of mine can come true, if only we can get for him even a part of this money for discovery rights. But even if we cannot, it will be good to do Dutoit out of getting it."

"Yes, indeed," said Gloria. "I wonder if anyone ever hated anyone else as I do Oom Petrus. I always felt he was insincere, and now even mother hates him. Really, it sometimes seems to me that if only we all hated hard enough, some harm must come to him. Just the same as when you all love someone, they must get the good of it. Am I very wicked to hate Oom Petrus?"

"Not a bit of it. You would be a horrid little hypocrite if you pretended you didn't."

"If only he could be punished," sighed Gloria.

"There is a Kaffir proverb—'*Height is not reached in a hurry.*' We must go slow," Martino replied.

After they had driven some miles across the veld over the rough unmade road, Martino turned his head and called out to Corneels:

"Is it very much further on, or are we nearly there?"

"Ja, baas, it is just over the rise," Corneels replied, and Martino laughed.

"I don't believe a Kaffir could give any other answer," he said.

"And everything always seems near when there is nothing in between," said Gloria. "I cannot imagine what England can be like; from the pictures I have seen everything there seems to fit into each other like a puzzle; why all the fields, isn't it fields you call them? are joined together. They look in the pictures like green pocket handkerchiefs with fancy borders. No barbed wire fencing. And the streets!

Without any teams of oxen, just crowds of people and vehicles, but what crowds, how can they all live? Not enough farms for them even to share, let alone own, and where are the farms? "

"The green pocket handkerchiefs are the farms, Gloria."

"How wonderful, and no kaffirs at all? "

"No, except some highly polished ones, sort of show pieces for missionaries to beg with."

"Would you like to go to England again, Louis? "

"Yes, dear, some day when I can take you along. I was at school there you know, and I have some English relations. But I expect it will be a long time before we can go there, Gloria. In the meanwhile, I am quite satisfied with South Africa. Aren't you? "

"Yes, if only it was happier at home. If only some good fortune could come our way. Don't think I am always grumbling, Louis, but you can't think what it is like at home now."

"Ah, Gloria, if only I could take you away altogether now, to a home of your own."

"No, Louis, no. I wouldn't go; I could not. It would be too cruel to leave them now that they are so unhappy. It would be selfish, and we would never really be happy if we started our life together by hurting others."

"But I shan't wait longer than I can help, Gloria. By Jove, look yonder how quickly those clouds have come up."

"Yes, I had not noticed them. I do hope we shall get back before it rains. Rain does not often annoy me, I love it so, but I don't want rain on this special evening."

"Perhaps it will only be a passing shower even if it does come. Well, we are nearer the kraal than we are Vuurklip, so it is too late to turn back now."

Louis Martino whipped up the horses and they quickened their pace, and soon in the distance could be seen a circle of huts looking like mushrooms, for all of them were round, the kaffirs' idea of architecture being a series of circles, for not only are their huts

circular, but also the huts themselves are built in circles.

"It looks like a village of toadstools," observed Gloria. "And we are only just in time, for the clouds are beginning to hide the stars as they come out, and I fear that after all the moon may not be our special lantern to-night, but that will not really matter, the road is not difficult."

The occupants of the huts, hearing the sound of wheels, had all run out, and Corneels was busy shouting greetings to his friends as Martino pulled up. The behaviour of a kaffir groom would paralyze a European servant, for he has no idea of solemn silence or attention to his master or mistress before he greets his friends.

"Come here, Corneels, and hold the horses," cried Martino, for Corneels was already shaking hands with his special pals. The children, half naked, and the very small ones quite so, ran round and stared, and then hid behind their mothers, and from that place of safety peered forth at Gloria, their fingers in their mouths and their stomachs sticking out like little barrels. They had just had their evening meal of mealie pap, and a native always eats until he can eat no more, the stomachs of the children visibly swelling during the process.

"Better outspan the horses for half-an-hour or an hour and hobble them Corneels; they rest better so than standing," said Martino, after he had assisted Gloria to alight.

The parents of the girl Corneels was to wed brought forth a chair, and Gloria rested outside their hut, and proceeded to open a parcel of cakes and sweets she had brought for the children.

Now when the cart had been approaching the kraal, both Gloria and Martino had noticed much movement amongst the people round the huts, and heard sounds as though the women were screaming, but they concluded that either the natives had been drinking over much kaffir beer, or else they were having one of their ceremonies. As soon as the cart

had really got near the kraal all excitement had appeared to die away. Natives are shy of having their ceremonies, whether of joy or sorrow, spied upon, and it is wonderful the way in which the calm of secrecy can cover them on the approach of their white masters.

As Gloria untied her parcel of sweets, she said to Louis in a low voice :

“ When Corneels has outspanned the horses, ask him what the excitement was as we came up.”

“ I will,” said Louis, “ but first I want him to get me the sample of earth hidden away in his box. You can keep his friends busy here while I go with him into the hut where his box lies.”

“ This is the hut of the parents, Louis.”

“ Yes, then the hut of the children will be near, I fancy. This tribe put their girls into one hut and their boys into another. Now I am going to follow up Corneels. I won't be gone long. Call his girl to you or she will be after Corneels too, and I want him to myself for a bit.”

Louis Martino then sauntered away to where Corneels was attending to the horses, and Gloria noticed that some excitement seemed to be restarting on the other side of the kraal.

By now the moon was up and shining brightly, but in a weird way, for heavy clouds passed every few seconds across the sky, so that the light was now vivid and then obscured.

The male natives near Gloria sat on the ground in the hunched-up manner peculiar to natives, their knees sticking up on a level with their chins, and their arms clasped round their legs. Some of the women walked around, their babies tied in blankets on their backs, and they gathered sticks and seemed to be preparing many fires. A low rumble of thunder sounded in the far distance; the women and children near Gloria, to whom she had been giving sweets, drew away from her. They listened to the low rumbling noise. Then there came a moment of intense silence, and again the moon shone forth.

Then the women one and all began to scream and point towards the clouds, and the men rose from the ground and silently gathered closer to the huts, and the women ceased screaming, and the sound of a strange, unearthly yell sounded.

Gloria shivered and her blood turned cold, for the sound seemed to come from no earthly creature, and into the open space, the circle round the huts edged by the outer circle of unlit fires, there sprang as though from nowhere, a most fantastic figure of a man.

This man was tall and gaunt, as though from long fasting; his hair was tinged with gray, and he wore an unkempt tangled growth of gray beard. His cheeks were hollow, and his eyes seemed like living beads set back far in their sockets. He was naked, save for a goat skin round his loins, and strings of skin reins round his neck, from which hung little horns and various other charms, and the claws and teeth of many animals.

He wore a fur cap on his head, and a girdle of tails of many animals. He, too, looked at the clouds as the women had done, and again and again uttered his piercing yell, and then proceeded to light the fires. When the circle of fires was lit, he turned and dashed into a hut, only to reappear later carrying a large calabash filled with coloured powders, which he sprinkled on the flames, and coloured smoke arose and made the scene more uncanny than ever.

"What is it, girl?" Gloria whispered, trying not to show how frightened she felt.

"It is the wise man, the Doctor Ubangini, missus. He drive the storm away; last come of storm it kill the cow and the wife of old Abraham, now storm do no harm if Ubangini send it away. Ja missus, Ubangini very great."

Then the natives, as if with one accord, became absolutely quiet. Not a word was spoken by anyone except the witch doctor, who then began waving his arms and calling to the clouds to go away and not to kill the cattle or hurt the crops. The silence of

the people was peculiar; one felt that they remained speechless so that the heavens might all the better hear the voice of the man who sought to do battle against the storm.

A footstep crushed the earth near Gloria, and the voice of Louis sounded close to her ear. It was now so dark near the huts, on account of the heavy clouds, that she could scarcely see him, and he whispered "Don't be frightened, dearest; draw your chair just inside the hut if I am not here when the rain falls. I must go with Corneels to another hut; the box has been moved. Say nothing and keep quiet, no one will hurt you."

Gloria had no time to answer before Louis had gone. Again a peal of thunder rolled across the heavens. It sounded nearer this time, and the doctor yelled to the people to go and bring out their charms. Men and women obeyed him, and darted in and out of their huts, bringing with them all sorts of strange things; dried snakes and withered entrails of animals, little horns, and in fact many things they seemed to hold and hide at the same time. And the witch doctor fetched another calabash, and in it he mixed more medicines, and then stirred it with the tail of a cow he had fastened to a stick, and with this weird weapon he began to sprinkle the people and the huts with the contents of the calabash.

Gloria had drawn her little chair—which was minus a back—into the shadow of the side of the hut, and a big native stood in front of her, so that the witch doctor in his wild prancing round did not appear to notice her. Then a vivid flash of lightning rent the heavens, and all the children began to scream. The storm was coming nearer, nearer, and every man and woman watched the witch doctor as though spell bound. The young men began to blow on horns to help to drive the storm away, and the witch doctor yelled at the thunder, which now as a mighty crash seemed to strike the whole world and make the earth tremble with fear and horror. The floodgates opened, and down poured the rain; so

heavy that it was more like hail. The goats all round the kraal began a frightened bleating, pandemonium seemed to reign, and yet the doctor never ceased in his wild antics to try and drive away the storm. Though the natives sought shelter in their huts, he remained out in the open space, dancing and gesticulating.

Gloria had drawn just inside the doorway of the hut, and that side being sheltered from the driving of the storm, many natives crowded on the ground outside the hut, yet as near the walls as possible, the hail slanting off from the roof.

How long the witch doctor would have continued his fierce battle with the elements is not known, for fortunately on this occasion the storm did not last long. It came so suddenly, so fiercely, and then with moans, as though vanquished, faded away, and the moon shone forth once more, while the fires died down and a sickening odour of watered ashes arose.

The people were well satisfied that Ubangini at any rate had done his work thoroughly. Had he failed, they would have concluded that he had eaten or worked too much, for the witch doctor must fast and do no work before performing his task. He usually begins to prepare his rites and work up the excitement of the people as soon as any signs of a storm appear on the horizon, and if they are satisfied with his performance, they not only pay him, but often slay a goat in his honour, and present him with its bladder, to be worn on his fur cap as an ornament.

Gloria gave Corneel's girl sixpence to put with the other money, or mealie meal, or what they should think fit to pay the witch doctor with, and then Louis came up and told her that he had sought shelter with Corneels during the storm, and now that it was fine again they had better be off home, for the air was full of moisture, and there was nowhere to sit where they could get any comfort, for the inside of a native's hut is not the place where a white man or woman willingly lingers, or even enters, unless compelled.

Corneels had permission to remain behind at the kraal on the condition that he should be back at Vuurklip by sunrise, and with a pleased grin on his face he inspanned the horses.

"I think Corneels must be very much in love to stay, and then walk so far in a few hours, when he might comfortably drive home with us now," said Gloria.

"What is an eleven mile walk to a native?" Louis replied. "They will light fresh fires and probably dance and drink for a few hours before they dream of sleep. They can sometimes dance for forty-eight hours and then are not tired."

Gloria waved her hand to Katarina and the girl's parents, and got up into the cart. The storm that had so recently seemed in so great a fury that it had appeared to engulf the earth in blue flames one minute, while an ocean poured from heaven the next, now had passed so rapidly that only the glistening of the sodden earth, and the dripping of the water from the thatch of the huts, told of it having lived.

When they were in the cart, and the horses set with their noses towards Vuurklip, Gloria asked:

"The sample of earth, Louis; did you get it?"

"Yes, my dear, but only in the nick of time; in another moment that box would have been emptied of its contents and given out as charms. But I've got it, Gloria, my dear one; I've got it."

"And?"

"It is yellow ground, Gloria, my dear, yellow ground right enough, only I couldn't tell you till we got away. One never knows in those kraals who is listening, or how much a native knows."

"Oh, Louis, and it means?"

"That you go to the Johannesburg lawyer as soon as possible, Gloria, and then we will see if we can take the wind out of the sails of Petrus Dutoit or not. Now my beauties! Best foot forward. Your folks will be a little anxious I am afraid, Gloria; the storm was pretty bad while it lasted."

"Yes, Louis, awful, yet grand; that is like life, I think."

CHAPTER XXIII

GLORIA told her father that if it could possibly be arranged, she would like to go to Johannesburg for a short visit, as Mrs. Hillier had often invited her, and so far she had not accepted. Mr. Fairbain replied that he had no objection, and he didn't suppose her mother would have either, but so far as the money question was concerned, he feared it was not possible. He, in fact, seemed surprised that Gloria should ask about such a matter so soon after their losing the farm.

"Of course, my girl," he said kindly, "I know it's pretty dull for you here. Your mother seems to have turned dumb, and, well, it's not like home any more. But, Gloria, you are just all the sunshine that is left, and I don't know what Johannes would do without you."

"But it would only be for a few days, father."

"Then there's the cost. I have nothing. Apart from a bottle of whisky now and then, what do I spend on myself? Not a farthing. I give it all to your mother, all I earn. It's the least I can do, and Gloria, I don't like the idea of your asking your mother for the money. You don't mean to be selfish, but youth always is, and why should you galavant about Johannesburg while she is just one mope all day long? No, my girl, I am sorry, but I don't quite see your going just yet, though Mrs. Hillier is very kind to ask. Tell her some other time you may go, but not now."

"Father, dear, Louis wants me to go, and he will pay." Gloria coloured as she said this.

"But Louis Martino is not your husband yet, Gloria. I don't see why he should offer to pay, or you should accept for the matter of that. We must

keep some pride, my lass, even if we have empty pockets."

"Yes, father dear, I know; but he wants me to, to see some people for him, and, well, father, it is a little secret, and if I go I might help him in some way, so I feel I ought."

Gloria knew full well it would be useless to put it otherwise than helping Louis, for her father was too proud a man to accept any sacrifices for himself, and indeed it would not do to give him full details of the purpose of Gloria's visit, for if it should come to naught, it would but mean another disappointment, with the addition of a debt to Louis Martino.

"Well, if it's a secret your father can't share, I'm not going to ask questions, Gloria, but I hope it's nothing serious. Don't get mixed up in anything you had better keep out of. One failure in the family is enough. I am that, and you are but a girl in years."

"Oh, but it is only a simple matter, father, and he wants me to buy a few things for him. You will laugh when I tell you some day all about it, really you will." Gloria said this, trusting to luck that she would be able to invent a laughable story should the grand coup not come off, and then she added:

"Besides, you trust Louis, don't you, father? He can't go up, he is too busy on the mine, and Mrs. Hillier will take good care of me."

"And will she know the wonderful secret?"

"Oh, yes, only no one else must."

"Very well. Tell your mother it is all right, that I have consented, and, Gloria"

"Yes, father, dear?"

"Don't fly away altogether just yet; we can't spare you."

So it was arranged, and Gloria went almost immediately to see Mrs. Hillier, who was delighted when Gloria told her that she would like to go to Johannesburg for a few days. Mrs. Hillier said it would suit her admirably if they could start at once, for the sports shortly to take place at the mine would require prizes,

and she wished to make many purchases, and added :
“ In fact, Gloria, I was thinking only yesterday of asking you to make up your mind to come with me, for a change will do you good, and also I am very selfish, I hate to visit Johannesburg alone, and Tom cannot at present leave the mine. No one can take his place, though there are always men around who would like the opportunity of trying ! ”

“ I am afraid my clothes are not very smart,” Gloria said.

“ Never mind, my dear, your face compensates for that. There are many women in Johannesburg who would willingly change their Paquin gowns for your smooth skin. The climate plays the devil with one’s complexion up at that height, and the women who go home every year spend half the time getting their faces steamed and ironed out and their hair brought up to date. Now we will, of course, go to the Carlton. I always stay there. For one thing, I like to go where I am known, and for another, it does so annoy a lot of folks to see me, a mere manager’s wife, able to live for five minutes at the same rate as the spouses of the mine magnates and bookmakers.”

“ It seems quaint to class them together,” laughed Gloria; “ the magnates and the bookmakers, I mean.”

“ Why, my child ? They all live out of other folks purses, with a big gamble as the fundamental principal.”

“ But surely there are some real ladies in Johannesburg ? ” asked Gloria, and Mrs. Hillier replied with her impish grin :

“ Lots, my dear. They are so real that one never thinks of them as ladies, but only as women. The ‘ ladies ’ are mostly those who have married younger sons, or whose husbands have purchased titles. But of blue blood, there are only two who can lay claim to any in their own right, and they stand forth as clean cameos against the vulgar swank of the others. Of course, the others all think they are ‘ in society,’ even if they only attend an occasional function given by the

Governor-General. Oh, the joy of seeing them practicing making honey pots in their own homes first."

"Honey pots?"

"Curtsies, my dear. The last Governor and his good lady insisted on this. And then the rivalry to obtain invitations. I knew one of the A.D.C.'s, and he told me half the women in Johannesburg were always writing anonymous letters against the other half, and posting them to Her Ex."

"And what did she do with them?" asked Gloria.

"Usually consulted Tobey, my pal, and together they laughed hugely over the torn-to-shreds characters, and decided that if they considered them at all, then it would be very difficult to invite any of the wealthy populace to dinner, and there would be no dinner parties, so they ignored the whole contents of the letters, and just invited two doctors or two lawyers or two financiers and so on and their wives. I fancy they were chosen according to what houses they lived in as much as anything, or what amounts they gave to subscription lists. They certainly arranged some fairly harlequin sets at Government House parties, and folks met their dearest enemies or their too-much-discussed lovers. It was all a matter of chance, but I hear that the dinners were good, and the table decorations were discussed by the diners for months afterwards as a pretext for introducing the subject, and thus showing off that they really had dined with their Excellencies."

"How funny," said Gloria. "Now I could not understand anyone being proud of such a distinction. There must be many more beautiful functions in life, and far more interesting; besides, from what I have read in books and papers, dinner parties are usually dull, and if the people were so ill assorted the conversation must have been stupid."

"It had its amusing moments, especially once when a young bride asked His Excellency if he were a Conservative or a Liberal," said Mrs. Hillier; and then added: "but I expect that is all Greek to you. You dear, sweet, wild flower, it will be fun to show you

round. Of course, you must be my guest at the Carlton."

"Oh, but——"

"No buts about it. Really, I would not hear of any other arrangement. And don't look frightened; I shall not be ruined by the bill."

So Gloria went to Johannesburg, and for her it was like going to another world almost, for the biggest town she had so far seen was Kimberley. Johannesburg, with its strange contrasts, seemed to her a place destined for drama, and, why she could not explain, but it gave her a strange sense of fear. The majestic buildings suggested to her fortresses, and the little tin shanties that stood so near them seemed as the sordid rubbish from which the fortresses had been built. She wondered what was guarded there? Was it the honour of the wealthy? or the work of the poor? And why a stately pile at one street corner, and a series of hovels within sight? Did each man live for himself and raise his pile on his own special spot? or remain without a pile but still on his own special spot? It seemed strange that no universal thought of regularity or fitness should prevail.

The people, too, they were just as unlike, yet like each other as the buildings. The painted draggletailed woman in the gutter, she often had the same features and quite as much claim to vulgar expression as the woman who passed in her motor.

"I can't understand it," Gloria said to Mrs. Hillier. "Somehow, in expression and so on, the rich and the poor look so much alike. I thought in a town one would see something speaking of superior education in the faces of the men and women who drive, something different from those who walk or take trams."

"No, my dear, not in Johannesburg," Mrs. Hillier replied. "Remember, this is a city founded on *luck*, not brains. Craftiness too will do in one way for one in South Africa what education may do elsewhere. Put you into a carriage, but it does not alter the lineage of your face or ennoble your ancestors, which is the Chinese method of giving titles. So you

may see a man driving a tramcar who looks vastly superior to the swell who keeps two chauffeurs, while a bar man may have a 'Varsity education, and the man who owns the bar be almost illiterate. Luck, my dear, that is the great thing in South Africa. I wonder no one has yet thought of erecting a monument to it."

Louis Martino had given Gloria the name and address of a lawyer in Johannesburg whom he wished her to consult about the discovery rights, and as soon as she had breakfasted on the morning after her arrival, she went into the hotel telephone box and telephoned for an appointment. She was disappointed when she found that she could not see Mr. Francis Layton before the afternoon, so eager was she to be at work at once on the important matter of the discovery rights. However, there was nothing to be done but wait, so she set off quite early for a morning's shopping with Mrs. Hillier, and having obtained her promise of absolute secrecy, gave her an outline of the matter that she and Louis Martino had in hand. Louis Martino trusted Mrs. Hillier as fully as she did, and had told Gloria that it would probably be best to make a confidante of her.

"Don't say a word to me about the matter in trams or in shops, Gloria," replied Mrs. Hillier. "It is not safe, for everywhere there are people in Johannesburg listening for information about anything, ready to sell what they hear. One cannot be too careful in this diamond-cut-diamond town, where many people live, not only by giving accurate information, but inventing it when necessary. See those 'stiffs' at the street corners? You could get any one of them to swear to anything you wished at any time. Yes, this is a delightful town, my dear. Did you say you would like a blue or a pink frock for evening? Or was it shot green? Ah, Mr. Vancohn, how do you do?"

Gloria then noticed that Mr. Vancohn was just behind them, and when Mrs. Hillier spoke to him he started, as though to pretend they had quite taken him by surprise. Gloria suspected Mrs. Hillier of having

eyes in the back of her head, and now understood why she had so suddenly changed the topic of conversation to that of dress.

"Ah, how do you do? Miss Fairbain, too. You up here, eh? Of course, you will both lunch with me at the Carlton to-day?"

"How kind of you," gushed Mrs. Hillier. "I am sure we would just love to, only Miss Fairbain and I have someone lunching with us, unfortunately."

"But you will lunch with me to-morrow, I hope?"

Mr. Vancohn glanced at Gloria as he spoke, as though expecting his answer from her, but she only looked at Mrs. Hillier. She had no wish to lunch with Mr. Vancohn, but had no excuse ready. However, Mrs. Hillier was quite equal to the occasion.

"Unfortunately to-morrow we are also engaged, and return to Vuurklip the day after. But the next time we are in Johannesburg, of course we shall be delighted."

"Well then, I hope that next time will be soon. I hear you are now living at Vuurklip, Miss Fairbain. I hope you like it."

"Vuurklip is certainly not beautiful. Still, it has its compensations," said Gloria stiffly.

Mr. Vancohn then smiled his adieux and departed. Mrs. Hillier said not one word until he was well out of hearing, and then she remarked:

"That is a regular director's trick. Feed you and pump you at the same time. I expect our director-lawyer friend is wondering what you are doing up here, Gloria; in Johannesburg one always wants to know what everyone else does, and why."

"And is someone lunching with us?" asked Gloria.

"Devil a man, my dear, but we will take a table laid for three, so as to look as though we expected someone. Now about that project of yours, what lawyer are you going to?"

"Mr. Francis Layton," Gloria replied.

"So. Well, he has the reputation of being one of the very few honest ones; you cannot be too careful. We have all heard the stage joke of it being the

lawyer's business to show his client how to evade the law, but out here some of these creatures go further than that. It often happens that the guilty get off, not only scott free, but more prosperous than ever, while some poor innocent devil is seized upon, and so cleverly blackmailed that he is not dropped until not only what he possesses, but also what he earns, is sucked out of him. One must be a blackguard one's self to deal adequately with a blackguard, and that is why a man with any sense of honour so often goes to the wall. He expects in others a little of the decency he himself possesses, and he gets drawn into the mud. Oh, Gloria, I could tell you stories that would make your hair stand on end. I have lived in Johannesburg, and some of my friends have been the victims. I know!"

"But surely some people seek revenge. I think I should want to," said Gloria.

"Yes, my dear. But if your enemy happens to be a lawyer, he knows not only how to rob you with impunity, but also how to protect himself. Still, life is long, and memory likewise. There are many people waiting for revenge. Years may pass. One has only to wait long enough, and the opportunity comes. But the best revenge is that which trips up your enemy without injuring yourself. I have known punishment meted out so that it came as a bolt from the blue, no one knew from where. Even conscience does not always remind the evil doer, for conscience is usually dead before he started this dirty work which ended in a just punishment."

"Yet we are told to forgive our enemies," said Gloria.

"'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' is also mentioned in Holy Writ, my child, and is much more satisfactory; and now, here we are at Stuttards. Let us see what glad rags there are for sale to-day. You want a little frock that will do to wear for dinner here and afterwards as a best dress, eh? Well, that will not be difficult. If you are young and slender you do not want a deep purse when you buy

coverings; only the ugly or aged need disguising or decorating."

After they had finished shopping they spent an hour looking at the exhibition of pictures then housed at the University, and this was indeed a special treat for Gloria. She knew so little about art that to her it mattered not one whit who painted this or who sculpted that; the beauty of the colouring, the poetry of the design, the thought, the imagination, all these appealed to her, and opened up such a new source of delightful investigation that she feign would have spent the rest of the day there. However, it was lunch time, and Mrs. Hillier promised her they would be able to go again before they left Johannesburg.

Mrs. Hillier and Gloria had taken breakfast in their own rooms at the hotel, for Mrs. Hillier had observed that she preferred a small breakfast and the luxury of privacy to a big meal and having to share it in the grill-room with men who divided their curiosity between the very few women present and their newspapers.

When they returned to the Carlton from their morning's expedition, they took lunch in the Restaurant. To Gloria everything seemed palatial, and she felt that she really must be a girl-out-of-a-book at last. It was such a novel experience to be waited upon by white waiters, and the Restaurant seemed so smart, and everything so comfortable, and she thought what a lot she would have to tell her mother when she returned home. And then a cloud crossed her mind. Would her mother care to listen? Well, there would be Johannes at any rate. How interested he would be.

Mrs. Hillier did as she had said, and had a table laid for three, and soon after they had seated themselves she said to Gloria:

"Look at the doorway, my dear; what did I tell you?"

"Why, there is Mr. Vancohn coming in."

"Yes, of course, here one always meets everybody

one day or the other, and must be prepared for emergencies."

"But to-morrow? You said we should be engaged to-morrow."

"Yes, and to-morrow I really must hunt up someone to lunch with us or we will lunch out. But lunch with Mr. V. I will not, though, of course, he is one of the directors of the Vuurklip, and unfortunately I cannot afford to be truthful to him."

"Why not?"

"Oh, my babe, have you forgotten that I am the wife of the manager? You do not know the spirit of South Africa; each one must kiss the boot of the one who kicks from above. I really ought to bully all the wives of the mine employees, so that they in turn cringe to me, only I don't. You see, I have been a worker myself. Yet, by admitting it, I am no class. Many women in this room have worked too, but they disguise the fact under their present positions. I am not ashamed, and so there must be something wrong with me. In fact, Gloria, I can't help it. My gore rises at the shams and the snobbery and the hypocrisy of this rotten town."

"You don't like Johannesburg, do you?" asked Gloria.

"Yes, in a way I do, and in many ways I don't. I once earned my living here for my sins. I was employed by the General Journal Syndicate, and did the ladies' columns. My child, if you want to love your own sex, don't be a journalist."

"Why, what did you do?"

"Tramped on an average seventy miles a week; talked clothes until I wished women wore none; Eve and the garden of Eden, how I longed for those days after I had written up three shops, attended a meeting for the re-establishment of gridirons in public play-rooms, and noted which woman spoke, which tried to, and what every woman wore; and then, minus lunch, for I had no time, but chewed a bit of biltong in a tram, and after that tried to feel charitable at a bazaar for the teasing of the tyrannically tired or some-

thing equally useful. Perhaps after that I was offered a cup of tea and the crumbs of a cake at an At Home if I managed to get there in time, but that depended on who my hostess was. If I was very late the hostess usually felt ratty, for her only idea in giving the At Home was her hope of getting a paragraph in the paper. Then more trams or walk if beyond tram radius, and if I had to attend a ball at night, I then tried to get some cold meat at my digs or something. Of course, no one asked me out to dinner. Those who might have liked to couldn't afford it, and others who could—didn't."

"But why?"

"I was only a journalist, a woman who earned her living, and the ex-barmaid, ex-chorus girl and ex-nurse in Parktown could not possibly know socially the woman whom they hoped would describe their gowns at the next function they paid to attend, or paid to give. . . . How Mrs. Dresden, that one at the second table, is staring at you, Gloria. My dear, we no longer scalp our enemies, but, my word, we do ache to rob them sometimes of their skins. That woman could well afford to pay a thousand quid for yours."

"But what a hat! It somehow seems to have been built on her hair and not made for her head," said Gloria.

"Perhaps her hair comes off with the hat, most probably; that woman—by the way, isn't her face exactly like a horse?—is said to sleep in her hats. One never sees her without one, and they are all remarkable."

"And who is the big woman over there, the one with the eyeglass? She looks exactly like the pictures I have seen in magazines of 'This year's principal boy in the So-and-So Pantomime.'"

"Oh, my dear, I wish she could hear you say so; some men admire her, men of a certain type, and so she thinks she is admirable, but in reality she is merely an ambitious Colonial woman who has pushed her way in the world and obtained a certain amount of

notoriety, or success as she may call it, by sheer bulk of body; certainly not by beauty or talent. Some people excuse her adventures by saying she is good-hearted. It is easy to give away when one has received more than one requires."

"Of course, I am here for the first time, and so everything interests me. But it seems funny that all these people, who I suppose know each other, are staring about them as though to take an inventory of what everyone else is wearing," observed Gloria. "I expect I express myself badly, but there seems such a lack of repose in everybody. They are not really eating their lunches; they are not really interested in whoever they happen to be seated with, but, well, now look at that little woman at the middle table; the man next to her has been trying to talk to her for a long time, but she has not heard him. She is watching the other tables, everyone seems to be watching. What do they all want?"

"New excitement; fresh froth. Yes, of course, they all know each other, and many of them know me, and most would like to know who you are, and as you are pretty they are reckoning you up and wondering which specimen of their patronage you are likely to pilot away. The woman at the middle table is very uneasy; she has managed to annex the one and only Lord at present staying in Johannesburg; there he is, the man who is standing by the cold buffet looking over the dishes before he decides what special dish shall be served to him, and she is watching him, not on account of anxiety as to his choice of cold beef or galantine of chicken, but just to see where he will sit, and hoping that he will not take the table next to us. There! he has done so, and oh, my dear, he is looking your way, and she has swallowed too much mustard without looking at it—must be so, for her face has turned as angry as a turkey cock."

"But why? I don't know him."

"No, but she is afraid you will, and, my child, she is thirty-five and has lived every hour of that twice over, and you look eighteen and have not lived at all."

"How dreadful it must be to feel envious like that," sighed Gloria. "No one here looks really happy, although everybody seems very rich. I am glad I am poor if wealth brings no greater happiness than to be envious of an unknown me."

"But most of 'em aint even really rich. They live on the credit of rumours that they possess scrip, which in reality they have never seen, and which when the shares go down they will vow they have lost."

"A man has joined Mr. Vancohn, so I hope he will not come and talk to us," said Gloria.

"A man? Oh, yes, I see, and what a bird! 'Beauty Henner' they call him in intimate circles. The last time I saw him he was on a horse admiring his own reflection in the shop windows in Pritchard Street. Do you call him good-looking, Gloria?"

"Rather; there is a certain style about him that is attractive, but he looks as if he cultivated it. I should call him a well-groomed horse, but should think his paces would be too mincing. More for show than for use. Is he married?"

"Yes, a wife and children in England, but very much attached to the wives of other men out here."

"Don't the husbands object?"

"No, he isn't rich enough to be plucked as a co-respondent, and no one has yet had the courage to kick him. Shall we take our coffee in the palm court? Then you must rest a little before you pay your visit at three o'clock. Oh, Gloria, I do wish you luck."

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. FRANCIS LAYTON lived in Johannesburg without being of Johannesburg, or taking any of its poisonous influence into his system. How he managed it the world did not know, but the world, to a man, spoke of him as straight, which meant that if there was any business with fine fees attached, but not of the very highest form of integrity, Francis Layton was never asked to take it in hand. His sense of honour was feared, and in many instances not wanted. Thus he had to be contented with a moderate practice and a small income, while many of his colleagues flourished in the land. Since Francis Layton had ideals and lived up to them, it also followed that he credited other men with having ideals also, and therefore often accepted lies as truth, deeming the man who spoke above the possibility of giving false or misdirected evidence. To be honourable oneself is to believe in the honour of others, and unfortunately, as a rule, thus become imposed upon. It therefore frequently happened that when Francis Layton's name should come forward, words to the effect of "Straight, yes, but too slow for our job," "A thorough gentleman, but no earthly use for tackling so-and-so," or "Tell him as much as you want him to know, if on that he bites and acts for you, then his name will stand well with counsel," and Francis Layton never ceased to be utterly taken by surprise when he found that humanity was just a little worse than he had deemed it.

He was a thin, spare-looking man, his bones covered with skin, but little flesh, not tall yet giving one the impression of dignity, and instinctively one looked at his hands, feeling that they must be delicate of touch, sensitive, refined. His face was clean shaven and narrow, with thin-pointed nose and dark

eyes rather deeply set beneath black brows. His hair was of silver grey, the kind of hair that shines without oil, and has not the slightest suspicion of a wave. A bachelor, and yet a man whom many women might have loved had they been admitted into his life, and yet so calm, so well ordered was his life, both at his office and in his home, he seemed complete in himself. A wife would have had to have been a dream of lavender and old lace to have seemed at all in the picture, while one could not associate him with children at all. Perhaps the secret of his calm manner and elusive charm was the fact that when he left his office he really left it, and entered upon another world when he entered his own home, for there he lived with the thoughts of the best writers of the past and the present. His library was at once his recreation, and his daily food, his mind becoming so filled with all that was greatest in the world of philosophy that it left only a part of it free for his legal work, and into that part no germs of the disease of the selfishness of sordid gain were ever permitted to enter.

Instinct is as vital a part of a woman's nature as scent is of a dog. She knows by the atmosphere of a place or person if she has come to the home of a good or bad character. She does not always follow her first instinct, more is the pity. Fascination or advice sometimes clouds the first revelation, and disaster is the consequence.

When Gloria Fairbain was ushered into the private room of Mr. Francis Layton, she felt safe the moment she saw the man before her. She had expected to be nervous, and all kinds of conflicting emotions had assailed her as she mounted the stairs to Mr. Layton's office. Mrs. Hillier had left her at the street door, saying she would meet her again at the Carlton for tea in the Palm Court, and the moment Mrs. Hillier had kissed her hand to her and waved good-bye, Gloria had begun to feel utterly alone in the world, cut off from everyone, and nothing before her but an interview of a perplexing nature with an unknown and probably brusque man.

But Francis Layton soon put her entirely at her ease. The grave way in which he greeted her, his gentle voice, the manner in which he asked her to sit down, the kindly look in his deep-set eyes, all these impressed her with security. He did not seem in such a hurry as everyone else she had met in Johannesburg. He did not look her over in such a way that she felt her sex and knew that under her clothes she was naked. He looked at her as though he was interested in a human being, not with the prizing eyes of a possible seducer, the eyes that fascinate some women and repel others. Gloria as she entered that plain room seemed to him a poem, misplaced within a legal dictionary.

"So you are Miss Fairbain, I understand. That was the name sent in, was it not?" he asked gently.

"Yes, and Mr. Martino advised me to come to you."

"Martino, Martino? Oh yes, I remember. I knew his father. And is Mr. Martino a relation of yours?"

"No, that is, yes, at least, we are engaged," said Gloria, and a blush deepened the pink in her cheeks, and Francis Layton thought of apple blossoms and the freshness of the promise of spring in the country in England; there was a something about Gloria that did not suggest Africa.

"Well, Miss Fairbain, I am very pleased that I am indebted to Mr. Martino for this visit. Now will you tell me what I can do for you? Take your time, there is no need for any hurry." There was an old world courtesy about Francis Layton. Into a few commonplace words he could infuse a feeling of sympathy and inspire courage. One felt that if one's confession should be trivial, he would not deem it such, and if impossible, then no satire would crush one's pride.

Thus encouraged, Gloria told him the story of the sale of the farm by her mother to her uncle Petrus, and then the sale by him to the Luilekkerland Diamond Co., and the stage at which things had now

arrived, the striving of Petrus Dutoit to obtain the money for the discovery rights. As she talked Mr. Layton did not watch her face all the time. He seemed to know that the recital must give her pain, and once when he discerned a catch in her voice, he kept his eyes fixed on a picture on the wall behind her until her voice regained its accustomed steadiness, and then he looked back at her eager face again. He let her talk on and did not interrupt her by a single question until the end, and then the question he asked was one characteristic of him, an enquiry that touched upon the limits of human cruelty rather than the legal aspect of the case.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me, is this Uncle Petrus you speak of an uncle by blood or by marriage. Surely he cannot be your mother's brother?"

"Unfortunately he is," said Gloria.

"To injure one's own blood, to foul the nest! Ah, well, young lady, let us hope he had some extenuating excuse. Now tell me," and he proceeded to ask Gloria a number of questions with regard to the reason of the sale and so on, and as she talked he drew a writing pad towards him and dotted down notes.

"Have you a sample of the ground this native found, and the date of its finding?" he asked after he had obtained all the other details possible.

"Yes," said Gloria, and she handed him an envelope in which was a sample of yellow ground, adding: "Of course, I cannot be quite certain to a day as to the date, but various things occurred on the farm just then that fixed the exact week in the memory of Corneels."

"But you have never heard of an actual diamond being found on this farm, have you, prior to the sale of the farm by your uncle to the Luilekkerland Diamond Co.?"

"Never," Gloria replied.

"And you can obtain sworn evidence, if necessary, that no prospecting was ever allowed."

"Oh, yes, that would be quite easy," said Gloria. "Only, of course, unless you think there is some

chance of the discovery rights reverting to us, I don't want to bring my father into the matter. It is no use to disappoint him again. It would be cruel. I should be frightened he——”

“Yes?”

Gloria coloured nervously, and Mr. Layton, perceiving her hesitation, quickly added:

“You need not tell me why; it does not affect the main issue.”

“You see, I did not tell him I was going to ask you. Mr. Martino wanted me to know first what you thought, and then I could tell him afterwards if it seemed really likely to be of any use; not if it meant only a vague possibility. Mr. Martino was very kind. He—he gave me the money to come, and if you will be so kind as to tell me your fee I will pay you to-day before I go. It—it would be a little awkward if you sent me a bill. Father might get it and be angry. You don't mind my telling you, do you? And I tell you now because you look so grave. I suppose there is no chance for us?”

Gloria's face was like an April day as she asked this question. A conflict was going on in her mind. Anxiety and disappointment fought with the determination to keep up a brave front, and not break down before a stranger. Gloria had pride, but not conceit, and so she suffered.

Mr. Layton leaned forward on his desk, and folded his hands. His face was certainly grave, but the tone of his voice exceedingly kind as he said:

“Miss Fairbain, I think it was very brave of you to come to me all alone to-day, and I respect the confidence you have placed in me. Do not talk of payment at present. There is ample time to think of that on some future occasion. With regard to this case, I will make enquiries as to how the law exactly stands in the matter of discovery rights. I cannot promise you absolute success on your side, but I can tell you this much, that I do not think your uncle can obtain justly one penny of the money he claims in regard to this point. Now, what I would advise you

to do is this. Talk as little as possible about the matter; say nothing to your uncle. I will enquire how far his claim has progressed, but above all try and ascertain more details of the history of this farm, and if possible sound your parents, or anyone you consider likely to know, if any indications of diamondiferous ground, other than what you have shown me, was ever actually discovered on the farm, and if anything in the nature of a diamond has ever been picked up, and the date. When you have ascertained this, write to me or come and see me again. In the meanwhile, don't worry. If you will give me the address of Mr. Martino I will write to him if you wish, as I understand he is so deeply interested in the matter on your account. At the same time, though I do not wish to buoy you up without sufficient reason, still, should you desire to consult your parents in the matter, and I really think you should, though on that point you are the best judge, then you may say that, in my opinion, you have a very fair case for claiming the money for the discovery rights."

"Oh, thank you so much," said Gloria, the April conflict giving place to a radiant smile, and she held out her hand to him impulsively.

"Unfortunately, right does not always win the day, but we will hope that in your case the end of the story will be, 'And they lived happily ever after.' " Mr. Layton permitted himself to smile as he said this. Something of the beauty of Gloria's youth and vivid personality seemed to fill the room, and to him she appeared more like the Princess out of a fairy tale than a farmer's daughter seeking legal aid to subdue a wicked uncle.

After she had gone, the room seemed still to sing of her having been there. A petal of a rose she had worn lay on the writing table, the air retained the vibrations of her voice, as one may hear music after it has passed. Francis Layton picked up the rose leaf as one may pick up a butterfly to put it out of the window, but a rose leaf is different from a butterfly, it cannot fly away, and a dusty pavement is no place

for a rose petal, so instead he opened a drawer in his writing table, and taking out a copy of "The Garden of Epicurus," by Anatole France, he laid it inside. He smiled as he glanced at the page he had opened at random, and read:

"Nothing will remain in any case of all our own work, and the love of old books is not more foolish than any other love."

For Gloria seemed to represent love and life and the conflicts of each. What was Francis Layton but an old man, not soured by years, but grown pleasantly philosophical; she represented life, he had become a storeroom of thought.

When Gloria reached the hotel she went to Mrs. Hillier's bedroom to see if she had returned, and found her standing in front of the toilet table eagerly peering at herself, adorned with a new hat. When Gloria entered she turned quickly round and exclaimed:

"Oh, Gloria, I read in your face that you have good news. Tell me quickly, what did Mr. Layton say?"

Gloria gave her in a few words the outline of the interview, and Mrs. Hillier impulsively threw her arms round her and kissed her; then said:

"Well, if Mr. Layton says as much as that, you can rest assured he will win the case for you. Oh, Gloria, how fine it will be if he can get for your people the money that Petrus Dutoit is asking. Think of it, fifty thousand pounds that brute is demanding. Why, Gloria, you will all be rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and be married in a golden coach and have six of everything; not six husbands, oh, dear, no. What nonsense I am talking, but I always do when I feel happy, or think someone else is going to be happy. And that reminds me, there is a wire for you, Gloria; it came as I was taking my key from the porter, so I said I would give it to you. I expect it is just 'Love and kisses, Louis.' Here it is," and Mrs. Hillier took the brown envelope off her dressing-table and handed it to Gloria.

Mrs. Hillier had conceived a great affection for Gloria, and she looked at her with love in her eyes

as she watched her draw forth the pink paper of the telegram out of the brown envelope.

Gloria read the wire, and then she started and looked as if she had been suddenly struck with a terrific blow. The colour left her face. She seemed indeed almost to shrink as though blasted with a great fear. She looked at Mrs. Hillier with startled eyes, terror was written on her face, not grief but abject terror.

"Good God, Gloria. What is it?" Mrs. Hillier cried, and without asking permission, she snatched the telegram from the girl's shaking hand and read:

"Louis Martino was arrested to-day two diamonds discovered on him."

The telegram was unsigned; it had been handed in at the Vuurklip Post Office.

CHAPTER XXV

THE life of a worker on a mine on an outside dorp is apt to be somewhat monotonous; some men take to coursing, and whippet racing is one of their pet hobbies; others become quite passable players at billiards, while on so many mines cricket or tennis are games played vigorously and often, while rifle teams get their weekly practice, and sometimes challenge other clubs. Yet with all this there is ample time for leisure or loafing, and certainly time for brooding if any man or woman is given that way. King Snyman had lived a life filled with spells of hard work, varied with periods of hard drinking; he was a strong man, and had no special love of sport, therefore his strength in his leisure moments was apt to embitter rather than amuse, and if the exigencies of the moment demanded that it was to his advantage to keep sober, then, his mind not being turned to cultured thought, he brooded over imaginary wrongs, and hatched new plans both for his own future gain and for the downfall of his rival. Although his reasoning powers told him again and again that Gloria Fairbain would never consent to accept his love, still that made no difference to his determination to, at any rate, "Down" his rival. The fact that the engagement between Gloria and Louis Martino was now known and acknowledged, made no difference to his plans. He hated Martino, and determined that he would ruin him in the eyes of Gloria. This he knew would be impossible unless he was also ruined in the eyes of the world. For months he had brooded over his passion for Gloria, until even the memory of her became as a living physical pain, and now, by the side of this, had sprung into existence hatred of the man he knew she intended to wed.

Great had been his success with regard to the I.D.B. he had practised with some of the boys in the mine, and successful also had been the way in which he had passed the stones on to his partner, Mr. Vancohn. No suspicion had been aroused in any way so far as he could see, and his income was increasing in a manner for congratulation, but as he grew more and more prosperous, so it seemed to him grew his contempt in a measure for that which this same money would be able to procure for him eventually. He could look forward to knocking off work if he so chose, and getting gloriously drunk every day for quite a considerable period, he would be able to buy any of the purchaseable pleasures any man with loose morals and plenty of money could obtain, but though he regretted nothing of his past, and knew full well he should have exactly the same future, still he would willingly have foresworn all such questionable joys could he but have felt convinced that thereby he might obtain Gloria. It may have been the contrast of her character to that of the other women and girls he had known, or it may have happened that her beautiful personality fascinated his senses. No matter, the fact remained, Gloria was all that he desired, and, failing her, revenge for not getting her.

At last his mind formed a diabolical plan, and the more he pondered over it and thought out the details, the happier he became, until his plan for revenge gave him as keen a sensation of delight as the occasional glimpses of Gloria had done.

In South Africa not only is coffee the chief drink of the Dutch, but most white men on the mines, Colonial, Dutch or otherwise, enjoy drinking coffee during the time they are on shift, finding it a very refreshing beverage; and certainly when one has seen the constant dust, which on a mine never seems to be absent, though at times much worse than others, one can understand a constant thirst requiring to be quenched, and coffee seems the safest drink. The men at the Vuurklip mine were no exception to the rule, and each man was in the habit of carrying his

coffee can in with him when he went on shift, both in the morning and the afternoon. All the cans used were of more or less the same pattern, and the name of each man was painted on the outside of his can, the lid of the can being used as a cup.

At about a quarter past eleven in the morning and again at five in the afternoon a small piccanin was in the habit of going round collecting the empty cans. He went first through the mine (the large open space where the natives load the trucks with the ground containing the diamonds, to be washed above), and then he walked up the incline to the machine. He carried a thin bamboo rod over his shoulder, and slung it through the handles of the cans. When he had collected in this way all the cans, he returned to the entrance to the mine, where he handed the cans to one of the guards of the search-house, who was supposed to search the cans to see if any diamonds had been taken from the mine and put into the cans, but sometimes this search was very lax. Then the cans were put outside on some shelves, and the men, when they came out, took their empty cans with them.

Based on this knowledge, King Snyman concocted a plan for the undoing of Martino. The morning after Gloria left for Johannesburg he got up a little earlier than usual. No one shared his room. He was quite alone, and no one could overlook him, for his door was closed and locked, his window, which looked out upon a little garden screened from the road by pepper trees. Further, he had gone to the luxury of providing himself with a striped linen blind. This he did not draw up. From under his bed he drew forth the trap-door trunk Mr. Vancohn had mentioned in his interview with him previous to his coming to this mine, and taking a key, which he always wore tied round his waist, he opened the trunk and raised the lid.

The first thing visible was an old suit of clothes, but everything in that trunk had its use. From the leg of a pair of trousers he drew forth a long steel pin, and moving the clothes, etc., on one side, he plunged

down his hand and with the steel pin he pressed upward through one side of the trunk first one little wooden plug, and then another one came out. These little plugs formed a lid on a hole, about half an inch in diameter, and about three inches deep, made in the side of the trunk. The little plugs fitted in very well, and the grain of the wood was the same as the edge of the box. From this cavity he took out several diamonds and looked them carefully over. Eventually he settled on one, a fairly fine octahedron of silver white colour weighing about three and a half carats, which he put into the pocket of the waistcoat he was wearing. All the other stones he carefully replaced into the little holes, and covered them up again with the little plugs. Then he locked the trunk and pushed it back under the bed. Shortly afterwards the whistle blew and he started off to go on shift.

The Vuurklip mine was an open mine, which means that so far it had not been necessary to make underground passages and workings. The mine itself resembled what the earth would probably be like, if a mountain had grown downwards instead of upwards, and then been dug out! Thus the hugeness of the size of the hole can be imagined. It was worked in different levels 150 feet and 190; these levels were like enormous ledges in the sides of the hole. Some 3,000 natives worked there loading the trucks after the miners had blasted the sides of the mine, so that the earth had become loosened. When the trucks were filled they ran by means of rails up to the surface or top of the mine. Louis Martino worked in the mine, but King Snyman was in charge of the machinery on the surface; thus during working hours they never saw each other.

It is in the machinery on the surface that the ground is broken up and "washed" that has been mined below. At Kimberley and some other mines the ground is taken away and lies in the open for the wind and rain to weather it, and there it lies for months until nature breaks up the hard lumps, but in some other mines the flooring system is not used.

The washing machinery is next to the pulsator, where the diamonds ultimately appear, the most interesting sight at a diamond mine. There is a large round flat pan, about 15 feet in diameter, in which ten arms revolve, the teeth of each reaching nearly down to the bottom of the pan. At a place on the outside of the pan the ground comes in mixed with water, and with the assistance of the rotating teeth is taken round and round, until it flows away in the centre. All the heavier parts are kept on the outside of the pan, from where, by a simple but very ingenious device, they are periodically extracted or "tapped." The diamonds, together with other heavy minerals, like garnets, carbons, olivins, enstatites, etc., are all gathered together this way. Great care has to be exercised to see that the "puddle," the consistency of the mixed ground and water is right, because otherwise diamonds may be carried away.

It is quite clear that the lighter in weight the diamond in comparison to its surface, the easier will it be lost, and therefore so-called *test stones* are used to control the proper working of the pans and other machinery. As a rule, small flat stones with some conspicuous mark are selected, and at a certain hour put into the ground which goes into the washing pan. Eventually the test diamond turns up again in the sorting, and the time of recovery is again noted in the special test stone register which is kept for that purpose, and which forms a valuable log book indicating the way the machinery is working. At half-past ten on the morning when King Snyman had opened his trunk before leaving his room, the Pulsator Manager came to him and gave him four test stones to put into the pans. As soon as the Pulsator Manager had left him, it flashed through King Snyman's brain that two stones would be better than one to use as an instrument of putting Louis Martino out of his pathway, and as he himself had never so far stolen a test stone, no suspicion would rest on him if he took one now. He, therefore, put three of the stones

that had been given him into the pans, and the largest one he kept and put it into his waistcoat pocket, together with the one already there, which he had taken from his trunk.

He then went and got a little grease, and taking care no one could see him, he stuck the two stones with this grease firmly into the lid of his coffee can.

About a quarter of an hour afterwards the piccanin came along for the cans, having just come up from the mine. The cans from there were jankling on the bamboo cane as he carried them. King Snyman turned to him with a broad smile, and barking like a dog pretended to pounce upon him. The piccanin roared with laughter. King Snyman then came near him, and barking again, pretended to jump at him. The ground was slippery with some water escaped from the pans. Snyman lurched against the piccanin, who fell down, and all the cans rolled off the bamboo cane. Martino's can was there, his name visibly painted on the outside. Under the pretence of helping the piccanin it was not difficult for King Snyman to speedily change the lids of the cans, taking his own and placing it on Martino's can, and putting Martino's lid on his own. The piccanin gathered up the cans and replaced them on his bamboo cane, and with a broad grin on his face marched off.

There was a grin also on the face of King Snyman, for he knew that now in Martino's can there were resting two diamonds.

The piccanin took the cans to the entrance.

Chance seemed to be working well for King Snyman, for though the guard on duty only opened a few cans, it so happened that amongst that few was the can bearing the name Martino, and in the lid, covered with grease, were two diamonds. The lid was put back on the can. The guard did his duty. He informed the police.

At twelve o'clock the whistle blew, and the men came out from their work. Martino was a few minutes later, as he waited to finish his blasting. Quite unconscious of any pending disaster, he came cheerily

along, his swinging step easy with the electricity of youth, a happy look upon his face. He was thinking that now he would hie him to the Post Office and send a loving message to Gloria. He passed the entrance, looked to see where his can was, took it and walked away.

When he reached the open space in front of his room he saw two men standing a short space from the door. He thought nothing of that, for twelve men had rooms in that block. These men he did not for the moment recognise, his mind was full of Gloria. But as he passed the two men they seized him, one on either side, and in the name of the law arrested him, for they were none other than two detectives. One man took from him his can, and taking off the lid showed him the two diamonds concealed there.*

That Louis Martino was dumbfounded with surprise is to state it mildly. He emphatically denied having placed the diamonds in the can, and protested his innocence. But it availed nothing. The horses of the police cart were inspanned and he was taken to Pietsrust.

King Snyman, peering through a crack in his striped blind, witnessed the arrest, he then stepped across to the Post Office and sent a wire to Gloria and another to the "Star" newspaper.

* According to the S. African law the diamonds must be found on a man to obtain a conviction, that is why he was allowed to take the can before arrest.

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE are friends who are good comrades in joy, but a source of annoyance when real trouble comes; either they fuss too much or sympathise too little. Mrs. Hillier did not belong to either class. She was a woman who could laugh with those who laugh and be of practical use to those who weep. The first thing she said to Gloria when she read the telegram relating to the arrest of Louis Martino was :

“ My child, this is a time for action, not for giving way to fear or sorrow. Of course you believe in Louis’s innocence; you wouldn’t be worth your salt as a woman or a sweetheart if you did not.”

“ Of course I know he is innocent,” said Gloria quickly.

“ Then also we have to consider that the sending of the wire may be a wicked hoax, or some foolish idea of a practical joke. You will observe there is no name put to show who sent it, and no message of love; so I take it that none of your own people sent it, for they would not have begrudged a few extra pence to offer sympathy. Now come with me to the Post Office and we will immediately send a wire asking if the arrest is true, and then hold our souls in patience until the reply comes.”

Gloria sprang up from her chair in eager haste, and very soon they were at the Telegraph Department of the General Post Office, which is only three minutes’ walk from the Carlton Hotel. Here again Mrs. Hillier gave practical advice.

“ Don’t wire to your folks, Gloria. If it is true they will tell you; if not, then it is better they should not at present be worried by this wire. The man to wire to is my husband, for, as the General Manager

of the mine, he will not only know if it is true, but it would be his duty to find out who sent the wire if it is not."

"But I thought of wiring to Louis," said Gloria.

"My dear, forgive me, but if the arrest has taken place, Louis will be in Pietsrust by now, in custody there, so your wire would be of little avail. No, I will wire to Tom for you; that will be best."

And so it was decided.

"Now, Gloria, we must wait patiently for perhaps an hour, or may be two, before we get a reply. Fortunately we got that wire sent off before five o'clock, otherwise you would have had to wait till the morning. And now since we must be patient and you look as if you had seen a ghost, the best thing we can do is to return to the Carlton and have tea."

"Oh, but I do not feel I could do anything till I heard," said Gloria.

"Of course, I know, but no good ever comes of sitting still and letting one's anxiety grow and grow. No, my dear, we will have tea and then, well I fear it will not be possible to get away before the morning, if you must return to Vuurklip at once. I expect that is what you will want to do if the reply is in the affirmative."

"Yes, I couldn't stay away an hour longer than necessary, and yet how selfish I am, thinking of myself all the time, and spoiling your visit."

"Never mind that, Johannesburg will remain in the same place. I can come up again when I wish; at the present moment I must take care of you. Now, here we are."

"Shall we have tea in your room?" asked Gloria.

"No, that would be of no earthly use to you, for we should talk wire and think wire all the time; instead we will go into the Palm Court and listen to the music, and you must try and not look too anxious; summon your pride to your aid, for if the arrest is true, then you must hold your head all the higher, so as to show that you believe in his innocence. You are beginning to live; life is a drama. At the present

moment the Palm Court is your stage. Don't be a coward."

The Palm Court at the Carlton is a much frequented place from four to six, when many people from the town and the suburbs, who cannot afford to come for the more expensive meals, like to feel they are "in the swim" for a brief space, which they are enabled to do for the small sum of one shilling each, and a tip to the waiter. Of course if they require ices or special cakes they must spend a little more. But it is not the actual feeding most of the people who go out to tea require, but the pleasure of showing off themselves and staring at their neighbours.

A nice little orchestra of stringed instruments performs music of a not too classical order, and as there are no windows in the Palm Court overlooking anywhere, then the people gathered round the small tables beneath the palms have ample opportunity of concentrating their attention on their neighbours. There is always the expectancy amongst the visitors of seeing someone they know, and always the possibility of having the luck to see someone they don't; the latter being always a pleasure in a place like a South African town, where one sees the same faces until one begins positively to dislike them, and the question who is with whom, becomes tinged with satiety if answered too frequently, and with intimate knowledge.

For Gloria all the joy of curiosity had gone, the fun she had so far obtained from seeing a, to her, new side of life had vanished, and as she sat in the Palm Court that afternoon she felt that all the people round her were merely shadows of human beings, with whom she had nothing in common; for who, indeed, save Mrs. Hillier, could share her anxiety? She was glad they had managed to get a corner to themselves just inside the door. True she had to face the room, but the crowd was to her now no more than a crowd in the street. She sipped her tea and declined cakes, and seemed unconscious of the many glances of admiration cast her way. Mrs. Hillier smiled and nodded to two or three acquaintances, but did not

encourage anyone to come to their table, and when the orchestra began to play she was glad to see that Gloria seemed to be listening.

Fortunately the conductor did not believe in a small orchestra doing otherwise than accompanying the tinkling of cups and the buzz of conversation. A heavy overture would have annoyed those who wished to flirt, or the middle aged people who delighted in telling nasty stories, and would certainly have grieved any genuine music-lover who might have been present, so the tuneful lilt of a valse sounded through the room, or such pieces that comes under the category of the terms "sweet" or pretty. The orchestra was capable of doing better work, but wisely refrained.

Still there came a lull in the conversation when a violinist, with some skill and much expression, gave as a solo "*Un peu d'Amour.*" To Gloria it seemed to reveal a world of emotion, the sensuous music fascinated her youth, but the haunting sorrow of its theme seemed to say that all that is beautiful is also a little sad. Two tears gathered in her eyes and trickled down her face. She did not wish to make an exhibition of herself by using her handkerchief, and she carried no powder puff, so she brushed the tears hastily away with the back of her hand, as a boy would have done, and then raising her tea cup, tried to hide her face as much as possible.

"Buck up, Gloria; that beast McGreedy has just come in," whispered Mrs. Hillier.

Gloria put down her tea cup and looked round towards the entrance. There, in the doorway, looking round him as though sizing up every woman present, stood the form of Mr. McGreedy, the Managing Director of the Luilekkerland Diamond Co. The man looked like a Liliputian caricature of a prize fighter, with his bullet-shaped head and determined jaw, in contrast to his hunched-up almost deformed body, his broad shoulders and short legs. His chin was pushed forward so that one almost expected two lower teeth to appear, as in the lower jaw

of a bulldog. His full prominent eyes with their sensual leer were light in colour yet seemingly colourless. His shoulders hunched forward; one hand was in his trouser pocket, in the other he carried a newspaper. The man who is grossly material is rarely shy, and the man who has many successes with women of a similar nature to himself is never conscious of his own ugliness or depravity.

Mr. McGreedy looked round at the many tables and the women, pretty, smart, or otherwise, dotted about the room. Several sought to catch his eye. Those he noticed smiled at him, and he grinned back, acknowledging their salutations by bows so slight they were almost impertinences. There seemed to be no one fresh present. He had the night before obtained an introduction to one of the actresses at His Majesty's Theatre; he had hoped to see her here. So he looked round the room, but found that all the women he knew, he knew too well, and he was wondering if he should stay or not, when the glances of his eyes, after searching the room, came back to quite near himself, and then on the couch, to the left of the entrance, he saw Mrs. Hillier and Gloria. Mrs. Hillier did not interest him much; her morals bored him, her tongue stung him without amusing. He bowed, of course, for she was the wife of the Vuurklip Manager, and he was never impolite though often rude, and as he bowed he wondered who on earth Gloria could be. She was looking at him too, and there was no doubt about it, she was pretty in a most arresting way. He glanced for a second, then back again. She was talking now to Mrs. Hillier, and what an exquisite face she had. Mr. McGreedy was interested in every type of woman, though he had been heard to say that he found the ugly ones usually the more exciting. Still the fresh beauty of girls was not to be scorned; good to look at for a short time, even if not very amusing. Of course, Mrs. Hillier would have to be polite and introduce the girl if he joined their table, for was he not the Managing Director of the Vuurklip? Mrs. Hillier would not dare to

openly snub him. He came to a decision ; he strolled towards their table.

" How do you do, Mrs. Hillier ? " he asked in his thick nasal voice, offering at the same time his well manicured hand (manicure girls figured amongst his proteges).

" Thank you, I am very well," said Mrs. Hillier, forcing a manufactured smile across her features.

" May I join your table for a minute ? I cannot stay long. Quite a crowd here, eh ? And Mr. McGreedy placed his hand on the back of the chair opposite the couch.

" Of course ; won't you sit down ? Miss Fairbain, this is Mr. McGreedy, but you may have met him before ? "

" Miss Fairbain ? Well, of course I must have seen you before ; thought I knew your face ; must have seen you some time or other. How do you do ? "

Gloria bowed, and adroitly moved her hands as though to prevent a cup falling. She felt that she could not shake hands with this man ; she had not yet learnt her climbing lesson. She forgot her father was a Vuurklip employee. She only remembered that Mr. McGreedy belonged to the set of men who had bought the farm. If she had been older and had been apprenticed to the Johannesburg school of intrigue, she would have flirted with Mr. McGreedy in the hope that her pretty face might gain his influence with regard to the discovery rights. But Gloria had not studied the wiles of the climbers, her mind was incapable of conceiving such a thought ; she only hoped he would soon tire of their company and go to some other table, or leave the Palm Court altogether. She hated his eyes and the way he was looking at her. She blushed and felt ashamed without knowing why, and then was annoyed with herself that she had done so.

" And what do you think of Johannesburg, Miss Fairbain ? Pretty gay ? "

" I don't know. I cannot compare it to other towns, and I understand one can only praise or blame

by comparison. It seems to me such a mixture of pain and plenty."

"How? In what way?" Mr. McGreedy was not really interested in hearing, but asking questions gave him an excuse for looking into her face.

"Well, all this, for instance, looking comprehensively round the room. "It is, I suppose, very grand, and yet outside one sees so many carts, which seem to be carrying the whole household goods of some poor creatures, shifting from one place to another. That looks unsettling, and not exactly prosperous."

"Oh, you happen to have come up at the end of the month. That's nothing; just men changing from one mine to another. That doesn't count; one has to weed out at times."

"Poor weeds," said Gloria. "Then the men, so many in the streets look sullen, and each time I have gone outside this hotel I have seen within five minutes walk, a drunken man, and more than one drab of a woman. It isn't clean. Johannesburg, I mean."

"Oh, Jo'burg's alright; you mustn't compare town and country, you know; we see life here. Now how long are you up for? You and Mrs. Hillier must lunch, or dine with me one night."

"We leave to-night, or to-morrow, thank you," said Mrs. Hillier. "Besides, your wife has never called on me, and neither have I called on her yet. I could hardly accept a dinner invitation without doing that first."

Mr. McGreedy noticed the angry spark that shone in Mrs. Hillier's voice, despite the quiet tone in which she spoke, but he was hide proof and had the impertinence to reply.

"Well, I thought we'd dine at a restaurant and do a theatre after. My wife is very full up with engagements. You see, she and a few others have formed a little aristocratic circle of their own; she doesn't call outside that set."

Mrs. Hillier could not refrain from asking with an air of assumed innocence :

"Are you in it?"

"Why, of course; only we don't interfere with each other's fun, we go our own ways. I am a fond but unfaithful husband. Talking of husbands, how is Hillier?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Good. Oh, I didn't see you were ordering a cup for me. No tea, thanks; I am on diet. Wonderful man, my doctor; awfully good chap. By the way Mrs. Hillier, this is a nasty case at the Vuurklip."

Gloria started, and Mrs. Hillier quickly kicked her foot under the table to give her the hint to keep herself in hand, as she said :

"The Vuurklip? Oh, is there anything in the paper? I see you have one."

"Yes, the *Star*. Someone apparently sent a wire to the paper to-day and I have just got a copy."

"May I see it?" Mrs. Hillier took the paper, and slowly, quietly, read out: "Louis Martino, a young miner at the Vuurklip mine was arrested this morning, two diamonds being found in a can he carried. He was arrested in front of his room, and taken to Pietsrust."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Hillier, as she handed the paper back, and went on talking, compelling Mr. McGreedy to look at her instead of at Gloria."

"Someone seemed in a hurry to inform the press," she said.

"A bad business when you can't trust white men," observed Mr. McGreedy.

"Yes, white men in South Africa, Johannesburg especially, are so very trustworthy, as a rule, are they not?" Mrs. Hillier could not forbear speaking with a touch of sarcasm.

"Well, it is a bad case, and I hope this man will get five years as an example," said Mr. McGreedy.

"And I hope the man who put the diamonds into the can will get hung," burst forth Gloria indignantly.

Mr. McGreedy looked at her in surprise, and Gloria said with flaming cheeks :

"Of course, Louis Martino is innocent; it is all some wicked plot."

"Oh, oh, so you know this young man, eh? This is interesting," and Mr. McGreedy looked at Gloria with additional interest. Her heightened colour made her look dazzlingly beautiful, and also the frank way in which she had spoken made Mr. McGreedy hope she might say something indiscreet. For if he admired pretty women, he loved profits also, and if she so championed Louis Martino, well who knew? She might know something and give herself away in her excitement. She was pretty, very. Crime as well as beauty holds possibilities of lustful plunder.

Mrs. Hillier felt grieved at Gloria's outburst; it could do no good, it might do harm. She laid a restraining hand on Gloria's arm.

"So you are very interested in this Louis Martino?" observed Mr. McGreedy.

"I am engaged to him, and I believe in his innocence as I believe in my God," said Gloria bravely.

"Well, then let us hope that this young man can prove his innocence," said Mr. McGreedy suavely.

"I feel certain there has been some mistake," observed Mrs. Hillier calmly.

"Oh? So you also are his champion; but do you know him personally?"

"Yes, I make it my business to know all the employees on the mine. They do not lead lives of unending pleasure and bewildering excitement, for remember, Mr. McGreedy, we are many miles from a town. When Mr. Martino lunched with me (I invite the men to lunch in turn on Sundays), and on other occasions when I have met him, he has impressed me as a young man above the average. Yes, I feel certain there has been some mistake."

"But, my dear Mrs. Hillier, surely you only invite the men on the staff to lunch?—the doctor, or the secretary, or the resident engineer, the chief elec-

trician—no, I suppose you do not even invite him, and yet, well of course.” Mr. McGreedy shrugged his shoulders and looked Mrs. Hillier over, and she longed to cry :

“ Oh, you snob, you unmitigated snob ; you think I only behave as a human being because I too have worked.” But she remembered in time that Mr. McGreedy was the Managing Director of the Vuurklip, and that her husband was the General Manager. So without being a hypocrite, but merely a woman who would not stand in her husband’s light, she said with a smile :

“ I am quite a Bohemian, as you know, Mr. McGreedy. I once wrote for a Johannesburg paper, as you no doubt remember. I knew all sorts of people then. Some have changed places like the pieces on a chess board, but I ? Well, now, the same as then, all classes of people interest me. You are going ? Well, Miss Fairbain and I, we also shall have to draw stumps, if we mean to pack our glad rags and catch the midnight train. No, please do not bother to call the waiter ; this is really my tea, though you would not accept a cup. Good-bye.”

Mr. McGreedy murmured that he had an appointment, for he had already risen to go. Gloria seemed only to have eyes for a page-boy who was advancing towards their table with a telegram.

“ Good-bye, Miss Fairbain,” said Mr. McGreedy.

Gloria bowed. She did not trust her voice to speak ; she only glanced at the departing man, and then she eagerly seized the telegram from the page and opened it. To her it seemed so brief. This is what she read :

“ Unfortunately true will be heard before Magistrate tomorrow have no further details love.”

Then she noticed that the telegram had been addressed to Mrs. Hillier and not to herself at all. But Mrs. Hillier did not reprove her for opening the envelope without first looking at the name ; she understood Gloria’s anxiety, and to understand is to sympa-

thise. She called the waiter, paid for the tea, and then said to Gloria :

" Come, my child, we will go upstairs and pack. Pull yourself together and walk out as if you owned one-half of Johannesburg and scorned the whole. You may be much before the public in the immediate future, and one must meet the stare of suspicion, no matter if of oneself or one's pals, with stoney indifference or arrogant assurance. The well-fed mob will only value you at the value you place on yourself, and the extent of the manner in which you undervalue them. Are you ready ? "

" Yes, but my legs feel shaky, and I believe I have aged a hundred years since this morning."

" Well, you don't look it; you wear your years well. What a vile hat Mrs. Tunbridge Wells is wearing; and oh do look at the ancient flapper coming in. Ah, that's over. Here we are in the lift, and page ! "

" Yes, Madam ? "

" Just take us up to the fourth floor, and then tell the first waiter you see that I want him."

" Yes, Madam."

" A waiter ? " asked Gloria. " But we've only just had tea."

" Very likely. I believe it was called tea; in fact I know I paid for tea, but what is absolutely necessary at the present moment is a small bottle of champagne, which you, my blossom, will drink the greater share of, and then you will lie down while I pack your traps. The night trains shake like the devil, so you had better get some sleep now. Then we will have something in the grill room and be off."

" Why are you so good to me ? " asked Gloria in a quivering voice.

" Stuff; I'm not good; don't be silly. Right, page, stop here, and don't forget the waiter. I am too busy to ring."

" I will send him at once, Madam."

" Thanks. Mind the step, Gloria."

CHAPTER XXVII

GLORIA sent a telegram to her parents saying she was returning, but would stay probably a couple of days at Pietsrust. She knew they could not get the wire until the following morning, as the Post Office at Vuurklip would be closed. Still she knew that through her sending they would probably wire to Pietsrust in reply any news they had of interest to her.

But when at length, after the long fatiguing railway journey, she got to Pietsrust, she found her father on the platform to meet her.

Not one word he said as he gave her a long hard kiss, but he retained his hold on her hand, and only nodded to Mrs. Hillier.

"Please forgive me, I don't want to be rude, Mrs. Hillier, but I've got my little girl, and I must just hold on to her," he said.

"Oh, don't mind me, I am busy. Of all the cold, dreary, God-forsaken places, give me a South African railway station in the early dawn. I will see to the luggage; you talk to Gloria."

"Yes, father, what news?" asked Gloria.

"Nothing, my dear. Mr. Hillier told me he had wired. I don't know who could have sent you that first wire. I meant to wait and write you a letter. In fact I did; it is in the post now, and will get to Johannesburg to-day, I suppose. Then I came right in; I couldn't work; I had to come and see what I could hear, and wait, in case you came when you got my letter. I can't help it if I lose my job on the mine; I had to do what I could. It's a bad business, Gloria."

"But, father, you believe in his innocence, don't you? You must!"

"I want to believe in him, Gloria. I liked him well enough, but this is a strange country, Gloria; one never knows when temptation will come to a man, or how much of it he can stand. If anyone had told me that I should ever get drunk I would not have believed them, but I made a beast of myself when I found how we had been done down. If I could drink just because I was miserable, why should not another man steal in order to be happy? It isn't for me to judge. Maybe Louis wanted money to marry you with, Gloria. That is no excuse, I know, and doesn't justify theft; neither is drunkenness a fair reply when one gets a knock-down blow. I should have thought of my pride and my people. No, Gloria, as one gets older one forgives the more easily, or should do, but all the same I hope he is innocent."

"Oh, father, he is, he is; I would stake my life upon it," said Gloria earnestly.

"Well, my girl, we have got to try and prove it. Now come. I see Mrs. Hillier has found a porter and collected the luggage. She is a good friend to you, Gloria."

"Yes, father, indeed she is. But, tell me, what does mother say?"

"Nothing; she sits and looks at the veld all day, or walks a little with Johannes; but she might as well be dumb for all she says."

"And Johannes?"

"No one has told him. There was no need yet."

"And what do you think will happen?"

"Oh, Martino will come before the Magistrate to-day, and then the case will be adjourned for the Circuit Court, I expect."

"And—and Louis?"

"Will have to remain in gaol awaiting his trial. I doubt if bail will be allowed."

"Oh, father!"

"Hush, dear; crying won't help. We've got to think; at least, you have; all the power has been crushed out of me. I can be sorry, that is all; I can't think."

" Poor father."

" It is poor Gloria now, I fear. Come, here is the hotel 'bus."

* * * * *

Events occurred as Mr. Fairbain had predicted, and after a preliminary examination before the magistrate the case was set down for trial, and bail refused.

Mr. Fairbain had to immediately return to the mine, for Mr. Hillier, who came to attend the court, said he would be glad if he could manage to do so, as the timekeeper who had taken his place during his absence had been taken ill, and they were very short-handed.

On a mine many miles from a station a man cannot easily be replaced by another without much delay, so, as Mrs. Hillier was willing to stay with Gloria till the next day, when she had been promised an interview with Louis Martino, Mr. Fairbain returned at once to the mine in the mine car.

Mrs. Hillier knew the local magistrate very well, and introduced Gloria to him when he had come off the bench.

Mr. Reitz was a tall, plump, genial Dutchman. He had fought against the English in the Boer war, and now sang " God Save the King " heartily on every necessary occasion, and bore no ill-feeling towards the British; in fact, his great ambition was that his little daughter should speak English, not as a Colonial, but like a real English lady. He was the chief magistrate of the district, and on good terms with English and Dutch alike.

" Well, Mrs. Hillier," he said, when they reached his private office. " I have just had my usual quarrel with your husband before he left. He wants me to convict some bad boys, but I say to him, ' Don't bring me too many cases. Give them a good healthy thrashing if you like, but don't let me know anything about it.' Now it is nice of you to come and see me, but we don't grant divorces here, you know; we only tie folks up, marry 'em, you know."

"Tom and I don't want a divorce just yet, thank goodness," laughed Mrs. Hillier, as she shook hands.

"I have brought Miss Fairbain to see you. She is engaged to be married to Louis Martino, and wants to know if she can have an interview."

"Ah, I am sorry, Miss—yes, Miss Fairbain, you are mixed up with this case; very sorry."

Mr. Reitz looked genuinely depressed as he waved them to seats, and his eyes scanned the fair young face of Gloria. He was a genial old man with a kind wife and a long family. He had a horror of crime, and the only complaint ever brought against him was that he handled the law too gently and was far too lenient. As a judge he could not forget he had ever been a law agent, and still strove to let the criminals off as lightly as possible.

"Could I possibly see Mr. Martino, please?" asked Gloria, her eyes large with questioning, her voice shaky with emotion.

"Yes, of course you shall see him, he isn't condemned yet; we will hope he will not be. You can see him to-morrow or, no, let me see, this afternoon at four o'clock. Of course the Governor of the gaol will be present at the interview; that is unavoidable, being the custom."

"Oh, thank you, so much; and will you be the judge at the trial?"

"I, oh dear no; I am only the local magistrate. The Judge on Circuit will judge the case, and there will be a full jury of course. Martino will, I presume, engage a solicitor and counsel to defend him."

"Can he?"

"Naturally. We are not quite barbarians. We don't condemn a man without giving him a chance to state his own version of the charge. You don't know much about law, I see."

"Nothing."

"A good thing too. I wish I didn't have to sit here learning about the depravity of human nature till I get tired. How is your garden, Mrs. Hillier?"

"The usual way in South Africa, wanting rain,

but we manage to keep it going, and yes, I think the flowers are very beautiful just now, but the trees want rain. When are you coming our way again, Mr. Reitz? "

" When that husband of yours has some more cases for me. I sent out the Assistant Magistrate last time, but I really think I shall go myself next."

" And you will lunch with me, of course."

" Thank you, I really cannot resist such a temptation."

" Come, Gloria, Mr. Reitz is busy I expect." Mrs. Hillier rose, and Mr. Reitz shook hands heartily with her and Gloria, and as he held the hand of the latter said :

" Don't be too downhearted, though it is, I admit, not a nice case. Still you know you are young, and mustn't take anything too much to heart. I've known your mother and her family many years. I was sorry to hear you had left Clevedon."

" We were sorry to go," said Gloria gravely. Then she added " Thank you so much."

In any small town in England news and gossip travels quickly round, but in comparison to England, South Africa is one big bed of gossip, and every fresh bit of scandal or rumour of crime is heralded with glee by the many people who love to talk and have no other amusement. Thus a Police Court is occasionally of far more interest than the Dutch Reformed Church, and a special hearing by the Magistrate is a serious rival to the Bioscope.

Gloria found herself—both in the streets and while at luncheon at the New Hotel in Pietersrust—the observed of all. The bi-weekly rag had come out that day and had given publicity, not only to the fact of the arrest of Louis Martino, but had also added their unasked for sympathy with the charming and pretty Miss Gloria Fairbain, the fiancée of the accused. No girl ever coveted publicity less, or disliked notoriety more than Gloria, as she tried not to see the insolent stares and endeavoured to be indifferent to the remarks overheard.

"Now for the rest of my life I can sympathise with Marie Antoinette," she whispered to Mrs. Hillier at lunch, when a farmer at the next table remarked audibly to a bank clerk: "There she is; *of course she led him on.*"

"I have recently read her memoirs," continued Gloria. "Father got them from the Pietsrust Library. I thought it strange that the people should want her blood because her husband was a good bricklayer but an indifferent king. Now I know. Life it seems is the same if you are a queen or a farmer's daughter; if you are a woman you are stoned, even if it happens to be the man who is accused."

"Don't mind, dear," said Mrs. Hillier.

"I don't, I am growing hard," quavered Gloria, but two salt tears that fell into her gingerale at that moment seemed to belie the severity of her words.

"I do wish hotel cooks had imagination," observed Mrs. Hillier. "I wonder why it is most South African food is utterly devoid of flavour. The soup might be water introduced to vegetables, but by no means on speaking acquaintanceship with meat; the fish has either no flavour or too much, the latter spelling ptomaine poisoning. And then the roasts! Well beef and mutton are equally meat, and that is all one can say; while as for the sweets! they make one think of the paste one used for scrap books in the good old days before stickphast was invented. My meals at Pietsrust usually consist of boiled corned beef, when there is any, burnt crusts, when I can get 'em, butter, and then coffee; a good meal for a labourer's wife, but then that is what I am."

"Well, Gloria, as soon as you have finished, I have. I vote that if we can get away from Pietsrust to-night we will. That of course depends on what you hear at your interview, dear, but if you let me know by five thirty, I can 'phone out to Vuurklip and we will have the car sent in for us and go out when it comes, and I will promise you the best grilled chop you ever tasted in your life when we get to Vuurklip, for you had better stay the night with me and go to your folks

in the morning. Thank heaven, I have a cook who can grill. These hotels never give you anything but a boil or a roast. I verily believe if only they started chops and steaks from the grill, the future prosperity of South Africa would be assured."

"But no one would pay half-a-crown for one course," said Gloria.

"Yes, in time we would educate their tastes. Now they like a lot and nasty; but once let them understand the divinity of a little and good, then not only food but even the Arts would have a look in in South Africa."

Gloria had often felt shy at the prospect of meeting her lover, but now that he was in trouble and would need her comfort, all sense of shyness departed. She felt instead as though she had for the time changed places with him. He would look to her for sympathy, she would have to be strong, protective, and full of encouragement. Indeed, when she was ushered into a room at the gaol, and found herself in the presence of the Governor of the gaol, she felt no timidity. Her love made her now brave, and all bashfulness seemed trivial and absurd, and when a warder entered, followed by Louis Martino, she did not give way to any wild protestations of grief or indignation. The look of almost wild anxiety in Louis's eyes, and the haggard lines already traced upon his face, telling of a sleepless night, struck her to the heart; but she went to him and clasped his hand in hers, without a word save the one breathing of his name, "Louis."

"May I?" he asked, as he looked into her eyes, and for answer she raised her face to his. The warder turned away and the Governor of the prison was suddenly very engrossed in a pile of papers before him.

Then they sat down and talked; not in whispers, for that which they had to say bore no shame. The warder withdrew into the passage outside and the Governor apparently was not interested in their conversation. They did not whisper it is true, but their voices were not loud. The Governor had no wish to hear; he was in his way a gentleman; and Louis

Martino was still in the eyes of the law innocent, not yet having been proclaimed guilty. Louis related in a few words what had taken place, and Gloria attentively listened. Then she told him of the wire she had received, and of the notice sent to the *Star*.

"But I cannot understand who could hate me to such an extent as to play so vile a trick upon me, and also who should wish to immediately inform you," said Martino.

"There can only be one man," said Gloria.

"Who? Your uncle? But he has not got access to the mine," added Martino.

"No! Oh, Louis, how blind some men can be. Only women know things at once, without proof, but with certainty. The man who hates you is naturally King Snyman."

"King Snyman? But we do not work anywhere near each other. We rarely even see or speak to each other. One must be logical, Gloria."

"Logical. Oh, Louis dear, to-day you seem to me just a baby. You are so clean yourself you want to judge others by your standard. Now I seem to have grown quite old, and I see evil everywhere; but especially I see falsehood, deceit, and diabolical wickedness in King Snyman. Louis, don't you see it for yourself? He wanted to make love to me; oh, it is horrible to use such a beautiful word in connection with such a horrible man. But, well, I hate him. Louis, he knows I hate him, and so it seems to me, that being thoroughly evil, he sought to throw mud at you in order to blacken you in my eyes, but how little he knew me if he thought it possible to succeed."

"But how, Gloria? We have to come back to facts, the diamonds were in my can; there is no doubt about that. I can only think that perhaps some native put them there, not through any malice against me, but because he either did so to escape being caught with them on him, or else he hoped to get them afterwards. You see it is all a matter of chance which cans get examined; they rarely, I fancy, look at all."

"Then, do you suspect the boy who cleans your rooms?"

"No, I don't suspect anyone in particular. I was so taken by surprise; I don't know what to think. I've been at it all night, thinking, thinking. I've never closed my eyes, and yet I am no nearer a solution than ever."

"Louis, believe me, it is King Snyman. If it had been a native would he have sent me a telegram?"

"No! you are right there. Gloria, the best thing you can do is to find out from the Postmaster at Vuurklip if King Snyman sent you that telegram. His name will be on the original form,* and the Postmaster will tell you I feel sure."

"Yes, of course he will; or if he does not tell me he will tell Mr. Hillier, and that will do as well, for of course he wants you to be proved innocent. Oh, you can't think how good he and Mrs. Hillier are to me, Louis."

"Well, why shouldn't they be? You have never hurt a worm, and now all this trouble came just as if you had not enough of your own before. Tell me, Gloria, how did you get on with Mr. Layton?"

"Very well, but that story can wait; let us see first of all what is to be done for you. Now if we can prove that King Snyman sent that wire, what then?"

Louis Martino thought for a minute, and then he said:

"There were two diamonds in that can. If King Snyman put them there, where did he get them from? This question, Gloria, opens up a whole chain of possibilities. Do you know a trustworthy native?"

"Yes," said Gloria, "I know several. There is Corneels."

"No, he is too young. Besides you want him for other work. Who else?"

"Well, of course, quite the best boy I know is old Claas. He used to work on Clevedon, you know; he and all his family, and his father before him."

* In South Africa this is always insisted upon.

"Is he truthful and to be relied upon?"

"Absolutely. Mother was good to his wife and little ones when they were ill. Yes, I could trust Claas."

"Then what you must do is this. Find out where Claas is now and persuade him to try and get work at Vuurklip, as near to the machine as possible, so that he can watch Snyman. It isn't nice to set a nigger to watch a white man, but it seems to me to be the only thing to do."

"I will go back to Vuurklip to-night, Louis, and find out straight away where Claas is."

"And now tell me, Gloria, all about your visit to Johannesburg, but tell me briefly; I do not know how much longer you will be allowed to stay."

Gloria related in as few words as possible all that had passed, and when she had finished Louis remarked:

"I had hoped to help you so much, Gloria, about that business, but now I can do nothing. I think from what Mr. Layton says, there is some prospect of success with regard to those discovery rights, and all things considered, Gloria, I think you had better talk the matter over with your father. Yes, to me it looks hopeful. I only wish I also could see daylight, but at present, to be quite candid, I cannot. If those stones had been found in my room, I might have had a chance. But in my can! It looks black, Gloria; I cannot help saying so; it looks black; it is damning evidence against me."

Louis Martino did not go through the farce of asking Gloria if she believed in him; he knew she must. The idea of even questioning her on the subject did not occur to him; it would have been an insult to their love and to his honour.

"But, Louis dear, everyone who knows you must know you are innocent; it is all too absurd," said Gloria.

"Yes, dear; but unfortunately the judge who will try the case will go on the facts put before him. He does not know me, you see, as you do. I suppose I

must at once see about a lawyer. The case may not come on for weeks, but I must have my defence got ready; simple denial will avail nothing."

"But what lawyer will you have, Louis?" asked Gloria anxiously.

"Oh, I thought of engaging a local one; Van Zyl is an honest fellow."

"Yes, but always spoken of as a fool, Louis. And you want an honest man who is also not a fool. Are there no others in Pietsrust? What about Kruger?"

"No thanks, a money lender, who uses his profession as he uses his prayers in the public streets, as a cloak for his own gain."

"Then why not have someone who does not belong to Pietsrust? What about Mr. Layton?"

"Yes, I would like to have him, and he would know all about which counsel to engage; but, well Gloria, you know I am not a rich man, and what little I have I wanted to keep for you."

"Oh, Louis, I could cry when you talk like that. You gave me the money to go to Johannesburg to see about my people's business, and then you begrudge using any money for yourself. We could live without the discovery rights money, but, oh Louis, what would happen to you if you lost your case?"

"A couple of years rest cure, or more; but don't look like that, Gloria, it hurts. You see if I—well, if I lose, I thought in the night I would take that money from the bank, and you could have it in case of illness."

"No, Louis, not one penny will I have; it is all going to be used to clear your name, and, oh dear, I do wish I hadn't spent a penny on myself. You will need it all, Louis. I will write to Mr. Layton for you to-night. May I?"

"Well, as to that I can write myself. No one will dispute my right to engage my own lawyer, but I hate spending more money on myself than is absolutely necessary."

"It is not for yourself, Louis, it is for me really;

for, don't you see, you must get cleared of this awful charge? You must ! ”

“ Or ? ”

“ Well I should have to wait so long for you, Louis dear ; and oh, but I cannot bear to think of it.”

“ Time's up,” said the Governor, and sounded his gong. The warder entered.

“ Gloria ! my Gloria ! ”

It was all that Louis could say as he kissed her ; no protestations of love, no asking for faith, but just a kiss of clinging strength, and then a look that seemed to come from the depths of his heart, and Gloria answered not one word. She could not say “ Good-bye ”—she could say nothing. He had her love, he knew that. She would work for him. He knew that also.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GLORIA declined Mrs. Hillier's warm invitation of hospitality, both with regard to the promised grilled chop, and staying the night at the manager's house. She was all anxiety to get to her own home, in order to find out as soon as possible where Claas was, and get in touch with him. She did not tell Mrs. Hillier of either her suspicions or plan of campaign, for Louis Martino had pointed out to Gloria that until they had some proof it hardly seemed fair to tell their suspicions to Mrs. Hillier; for, after all, she was the wife of the Manager of the mine, and it would not be right to prejudice her against anyone until they were more certain of their ground. So Gloria said little beyond mentioning the fact that Louis Martino intended to engage Mr. Layton on his behalf, and that she, Gloria, was going to try and fathom many matters, but thought it better to say nothing at present. Mrs. Hillier asked no questions. She was not at all an inquisitive woman, and never imagined she was being snubbed, if anyone did not at once take her fully into their confidence.

" You see you are the Queen of Vuurklip, and if I suspect one of your subjects, I must not speak until I can ask you for his head ! " said Gloria, and Mrs. Hillier replied :

" I expect you are right, dear ; you know where to find me when you want me, and if there is anything you feel you would like to tell Tom privately at any time, well do so. I shan't be jealous ; you may whisper sweet nothings or great somethings into his ear to your heart's content. Sometimes I rather like not to know all details beforehand, for if I dislike anyone, or feel I ought to, then I am apt to say ' Off with his head ' before the knife is sharp enough. I

always want to hurry things up. But don't, in your concern for Louis, overlook that other matter of the discovery rights. I suppose I ought not to say that even, for my husband is employed by the very folks you must fight to get justice from. Yes, I suppose I am in rather an awkward position, but I can't help that, and I wish you luck, Gloria, in every way and with all my heart."

"I know you do, and it is such a very big heart you have," Gloria replied.

It was after nine o'clock when Gloria opened the little garden gate of her home, and found her father disconsolately walking up and down the few and narrow pathways. William Fairbain was delighted to welcome Gloria back, though he had not expected her until the next day at the very earliest. Gloria entered the house and deposited her wraps, etc., in her bedroom; then went to her brother's room and kissed little Johannes as he lay asleep. She then found her mother, who sat all alone in the general living room, looking out of the window as usual. The lamp was unlit, and the moonlight streamed in through the window and lit up the veld outside.

"Won't you have the lamp lit, mother dear?" asked Gloria.

"Ach, no Gloria, the lamp won't lighten our darkness. Why waste oil? There's the gloom of a man's sin over the house, Gloria. Go to your father; I'm best so."

"Have you had supper, mother?"

"Yes, but there's food in the pantry if you are hungry, girl."

"I am not hungry. Are you tired, mother?"

"Of life, yes Gloria, but not of work; there isn't enough to do here, it's so small one can't breathe if one moves about. I'm best sitting still. Through this window I can look out at space; the walls come together and one is all of a heap, if one looks indoors and thinks."

"Then don't think any longer, mother."

"Go to your father, Gloria; you don't understand."

Gloria turned away with a sigh. She felt that her mother spoke the truth; she, Gloria, did not understand! There was something in her mother's mind she could not fathom, some mystery she could not penetrate. Grief at leaving Clevedon, yes she could understand that; bitter resentment at the way in which Petrus Dutoit had betrayed them, yes that also she could comprehend; but still there must be something more that should cause her mother to behave as she had done, ever since the farm had been sold to the Luilekkerland Diamond Co.; something she would not speak of. And yet Gloria felt convinced that no peace could come to her mother until that something had been told. What could it be?

Gloria joined her father in the garden, and so gently did he sympathise with her concern about Louis, that it almost seemed as though he was placing on one side his own disappointments in life, in order to more easily help her. And thus encouraged, Gloria told him her thoughts and suspicions about King Snyman, and the plan she and Louis had discussed for getting the aid of Claas.

"Leave Claas to me, Gloria. I can see to that matter," said he. "Claas is working now on Diepfontein Farm, but he would leave at once if I found him work I wanted him to do. I do not think there will be any difficulty in getting him work near the machine, and then, Gloria, you must help with the rest. For, if I am your father, I am also an employee at the Vuurklip mine, and it would not do Louis any good if it got to be known that I was working on his behalf in this way, for if he has enemies they will watch me, never fear that. So you had better give Claas directions whom you want watched, and then arrange with him to give you what news he has. Better see him after dark, at the back of the house; not safe anywhere else. Remember, on a diamond mine there are white and black spies, and one has to go carefully, even if the object is good. We must avoid giving rise to any suspicions, or we shall get arrested as being Martino's accomplices next.

" Oh, father, surely that is not possible? " cried Gloria.

" Everything is possible, and a knave who will do one evil thing will do another. We cannot charge this Snyman with what we suspect; we have to prove him guilty. And, after all, what do we suspect? Only that he may have put the diamonds into the can through jealousy. That proves nothing, and he could get up a very good libel case against us, if we dared to say such a thing with no evidence to go upon. You may dislike a man, but that doesn't prove him to be a blackguard, and he may hate someone, but that is not to say he is going to try and ruin that man. When you come to think of it, Gloria, you have precious little to go upon."

" Still I feel convinced it is he, and nothing and no one will shake that conviction," said Gloria firmly.

" Then tell Claas to watch, but don't tell him why; a native works better the less he has in his head at one time. I will get up early to-morrow, or, better still, Gloria, you go and see Claas. It will be enough if I speak to the Compound Manager and get him a job at the mine. I don't think it will further Martino's interest if I do more at present. I hope he has got a good lawyer to advise him."

" Yes, father, he will ask Mr. Francis Layton to go to Pietsrust to see him; and, father, there is another matter Louis advised me to talk to you about. I wonder if it will be possible, when Mr. Layton comes down, if you could go to Pietsrust to see him also."

" I? What could I do with Martino's lawyer? I know nothing about the case, and so far as I can hear no one at Vuurklip knows anything either. Of course I am not in the confidence of the Police, or of Mr. Hillier for that matter. I don't know what they are likely to do. No, I see no good in going to Pietsrust to see Martino's lawyer; not at present anyway."

" But, father, it is about yourself and mother."

" Why, what on earth are you talking about, Gloria? "

"It's the secret I went to Johannesburg about, father."

"The secret? Oh yes, I remember, but I thought that was only some lover's secret, to enquire the price of furniture or something of that sort."

"No, father, it was more than that."

"Well, then, what was it?"

Then Gloria told her father of the conversation she had had with Louis about the discovery rights, and her subsequent visit to Mr. Layton, and his opinion on the matter.

William Fairbain listened to Gloria, without saying one word to interrupt the thread of her narrative. So quiet indeed was he, that she turned and looked into his face, and she was amazed at the strength of decision she saw there in the firmly set mouth, and the frowning forehead, and when his eyes looked into hers she could see a fierce fire glowing therein, as though a rage held in check for years was now coming to a head.

"Father," she said gently. But William Fairbain seemed not to hear her now; his ears had gleaned the gist of her discourse, and into his mind had crept but one thought, *Revenge!*

"So Petrus Dutoit can be stopped from further stealing! If we get the money no matter, so long as he doesn't. Why, Gloria, I would pay with my last penny to do that hound down; yes, pay for it without thought of what we might gain. What is money beside revenge? Revenge, it's a fine word, Gloria; there's a ring I like about it. I still owe Petrus Dutoit that sjamboking. I am only waiting, and if I could baulk him first, good, why I might even get him into gaol, Gloria, for trying to obtain money under false pretences. Did you ask Mr. Layton that?"

"No, father dear; I was only thinking of helping you and mother, I did not so much think of revenge."

"No, Gloria, it's all love at your age, but when you get to my years you will find that even love isn't in it by the side of hate! It's hate that I feel now,

it outweighs all else, and it's hate your mother feels as she sits by the window. What's love to her now? Only an affectionate habit; but it's hate that burns in her breast and lives vitally."

"Father, don't meet Oom Petrus till your hatred has burned itself out a little; it might mean murder," and Gloria's face blanched as she saw the set look deepen in her father's face.

"It will mean murder if your mother goes clean daft," he answered grimly.

Gloria said nothing for a few minutes. Up and down the narrow pathway of the garden they walked, William Fairbain feeding on his thoughts, Gloria scenting the delicious odour of the flowers of a few tobacco plants growing like weeds on the stony earth, wondered why life seemed so full of beauty and ugliness, while happiness and cruelty came to one, side by side with pain. How bright the stars were in the dark dome above, each one seemed to stand forth as though silver lanterns were being suspended through space, large brilliant jewels, such stars as are never seen in the northern hemisphere. Gloria had seen no others. The sun, the moon, the stars, surely they were lights specially given by the great God to illuminate our minds as well as our lives? And yet how dense seemed the depth of gloom at times, and how impossible to penetrate or understand.

But William Fairbain took no heed of the night or nature, his feet seemed to crunch the gravel on the pathway heavily, as though he feign would have crushed out thereby the life of the man he hated. His hands were clenched too, and his thoughts black with vengeance. They neither of them talked for some time, and then it was the voice of the man who spoke.

"So you say the lawyer wanted to know if there had ever been any prospecting done in former times?"

"Yes, father."

"And you said No."

"Of course, for this is what I have always been told."

" And he asked you if anyone had ever found anything to indicate a diamond proposition ? "

" Yes, father. "

" And you said ? "

" I said No. "

" It was a lie, Gloria. I once found some garnets when sinking the well on the boys' kraal. "

" You did, father ? "

" Yes, and what is more I told your mother. "

" And what did she say ? "

" She got very angry, Gloria, and said she would as soon see blood, she would have no prying into the farm. ' Leave the bowels of the earth alone, William, unless you and me are going to fall out, ' she said, and she was so upset for days, as though the thought haunted her, and Gloria ? "

" Yes, father. "

" That was just before little Johannes was born. And when she found he was not likely to grow like other boys she got fever and was light-headed, and kept saying ' It's the curse for disturbing the earth, we put the dead under the earth, leave the living on the top. ' She seemed to get quite daft about the idea that the farm might get prospected, and so I promised her I would not say a word about the garnets, and we've been friends ever since, till now. "

" But, father dear, she doesn't blame you now ? "

" She trusted I would always keep the farm for her, and I haven't. She says nothing, but I know she is bitter that I, her husband, couldn't see through the plot of her brother. You see she knew that I had education. She thought that that gave me an insight into many things. I have failed her. "

" Father, let us go to her now; no good can come in letting her be so much alone; we are drifting every day further apart. Let us tell her all I have told you. It is right she should know, and it may ease her mind. "

" But if the law fails us ? "

" Why, even then, anything is better than this awful silence; better the uncertainty of a chance, or

the wrangle of an argument, than this awful life of drifting away from each other. Oh, father, it will be so terrible if our love for each other gets swamped in the hatred we have for Oom Petrus; we lose, lose, lose, all the time our love and our life, better poverty than indifference. We must make mother talk. I would rather she even raved at me than looked away from us. She says little, but when you are there she never seems to speak at all, father."

"Very well." The tone was grim, and William Fairbain drew his shoulders together with a shudder. It was growing late, but it was not the night air that chilled him. He hated now every minute he spent indoors. The last few nights he had dragged a camp bed out on to the stoep and slept there. It seemed less lonely than by the side of the woman who was his wife, yet who rarely spoke and never looked at him.

The house seemed weirdly silent. Outside, the crickets in the grass and the frogs in the little duck pool, and the beetles on the plants, all had made the night hum with their veld song; but indoors there was silence and darkness. Upstairs Johannes had awakened, and he cried silently, his head beneath the cotton sheet, trying not to be heard, for he knew he was a man child, and men mustn't cry.

At the small square window of the living room the stout Colonial woman still sat and gazed across the veld. She had not fallen asleep; her eyes were wide open, glittering a little to-night as though the star-light and the moon-light had both given something of their sparkle. Her hands tightly clenched the arms of the big upright chair she sat in. It was a Dutch chair of dark teak with a strong rush plaited seat, one of the old chairs in which her mother and her grandmother had sat in before her. No lamp was lit. She sat in the shadow, but her eyes looked out into the light of the night, and light of the night shone in upon her set face. It almost seemed to Gloria as she entered that she saw her mother's face only, and that her body had disappeared altogether, for the dark

shadows so completely enveloped her and her black clothing.

"Not gone to bed yet, mother?" said her husband, trying to banish the hardness from his voice, and endeavouring to speak naturally. But no answer came from the motionless form in the window.

"I won't light the lamp yet, father. Let us sit a little by mother in the dark, and look out with her at the stars," said Gloria gently, and she took her father's hand and led him to a chair opposite her mother, while she drew forward a little stool for herself, and sat between.

Gloria laid a soft caressing hand then on the tightly clenched hand of her mother, but receiving no response, drew it away again. Aletta Fairbain was even less responsive to Gloria than she had been earlier in the evening. Now she ignored both her and her husband altogether. She seemed to be dreaming with her eyes open; only her breathing betrayed the fact that she was not in a trance. And Gloria felt certain that even the breathing was not quite right. She seemed to know that the heart of her mother had been strained to breaking point. So softly she breathed for a few seconds, then the heart seemed to stand still, only to start off again so quickly, that a little gasp came through her throat, and the lips, so tightly closed the minute before, opened to let the strangled sigh escape. It was easy to see that Mrs. Fairbain was suffering, both mentally and physically now.

William Fairbain looked at his wife and then out across the short dry grass of the veld. He said nothing, feeling suddenly impotent, only his hatred of Petrus Dutoit turned from boiling point to a still sullen loathing; anger seemed too little in front of that suffering woman.

Then Gloria began to talk. She summoned all her courage together, and talked to her father, determined that sooner or later she would make her mother listen. She began again her story of her visit to Louis Martino, and then passed on to her advice to him to have the lawyer from Johannesburg instead of the

one at Pietsrust. Her father said ' Yes ' or ' No ' or nodded his head. He, too, was watching to see the effect upon the silent woman, who continued to stare out of the window. Gloria then went on to relate her journey to Johannesburg and her visit to Mr. Layton, but not until she mentioned the name of her uncle did her mother seem to have heard a word. Then a shiver passed over her, as though she had seen a snake, and Gloria continued her story of the discovery rights, and the chance there was of their perhaps getting the money.

William Fairbain was watching his wife's face then, the moonlight playing upon her showed that her lips were quivering, and, interrupting Gloria, he leaned forward, and tapping his wife on her knees, said :

" Listen, Aletta, there is a chance of doing Petrus down ; listen, you shall get some of your own back."

Then the woman withdrew her gaze from the window, and her voice shook with emotion, as she said in a tone of utter despondency :

" Will that give me back my graves ? "

Gloria looked at the faces of her father and mother bending towards each other in the shaft of silver light, and she shuddered, for she thought she had never seen before so tragic a scene as those two beings she loved so well, so near to each other, and yet separated, as though the silver light was an unsheathed sword between.

William Fairbain was at a loss how to answer. He drew back into his chair ; he too seemed to shrivel into the darkness.

" Go on with your story, Gloria," he said in a harsh voice, as though even his voice had been bruised.

Her mother had at any rate spoken, so Gloria now addressed her as she continued :

" But, mother," she said, " although it seems pretty certain that Oom Petrus can be prevented from getting the money, still of course it would be more certain if only it could be proved that some stones,

or yellow ground, or something, had been found before, before even he ever thought of looking. Now if only someone had found a diamond long ago, then that would mean, if it could be proved, that he at any rate did not discover the mine, and if it was only you, or father for instance, who had even seen garnets, then we might get the money for ourselves. The question is, has any such thing ever been found? "

Again the lips of the woman quivered and a change came into her face. The set look departed and an expression of almost awe took its place, the kind of expression one might expect to see on the face of a victim, who has been on the point of death, and then draws back from the spectre, and by a confession saves himself. Horror yet eagerness was there, a great effort as though unlocking a secret of years, and yet anxiety to let the secret loose, not only the lips but the whole jaw of Aletta Fairbain shook, as she turned from Gloria, and, raising her right hand, pointed through the window at the distant veld.

" I found the diamonds, I, out there, there on the veld where the graves of my people lie, there when I dug to plant the trees I found them then, three, one, two, three. I dug the holes for the trees, I was strong, so strong, and I found one near where grandfather lay, and another where my father had just been buried, and I carried them home, and I showed them to my mother and she wept, great tears that tore her, and she rocked to and fro, and said : ' Aletta, promise no one shall ever dig for stones, no one, no one, or the curse of me and my father and my father's people shall come, and haunt and crush the life away, and you and those who come after you shall starve and rot.' And I promised, and I hid the stones, and then my mother she died too, and as the pastor read the service, a man stooped down and picked up something from the heaped-up earth, and I snatched it from his hand. That man was my brother Petrus. He didn't see that it was a diamond, he only suspected; but I found the other two before then, two

years before then, and I hid them away, and they are in hiding now. But the graves, my people's graves, now they lie on the land of the stranger and the curse is on our house. I told not even my husband. I kept it locked here in my heart, the secret, and now I sit and watch for the graves out there to open. Miles of veld between, miles of veld, but I hear my mother's voice, she calls and curses me, and I look and see her to-night, for to-night she died, years ago, years ago."*

The tragic voice ceased and the woman covered her face with her hands, as though ashamed, and her body swayed to and fro.

Then a thought struck Gloria, quite suddenly like a ray of light, and eagerly she touched her mother and cried :

" Oh, but mother, listen, listen, if only we win this case we should have so much money perhaps we could buy back the piece of land where the graves are. Oh, mother, yes, we must, we must."

Mrs. Fairbain let her hands fall into her lap, and she looked keenly at Gloria.

" Buy back the land? Just the little piece where they lie at rest, and no one dig, dig, dig? "

" Yes, mother, I feel we shall, I feel we shall."

Mrs. Fairbain seemed to take this thought into her mind, it ran through her as a healing light, and suddenly she burst forth into violent sobbing. The flood gates were loosened; her mind was saved.

" My wife, my wife," William Fairbain cried, as he sprang forward and clasped her in his arms.

Gloria slipped quietly away, there seemed to be nothing more she could do just then.

In South Africa, when the farms are situated a long distance from the railway and towns, Boers make the graves of their relations on their farms.

* This speech was given in a mixture of Dutch and English.

CHAPTER XXIX

TIME flies so quickly when one is happy that time does not even exist, and we only realise that we have lived when a breathing space, caused by unhappiness, or indifference, turns our faces to look back at the past; but no moments are so long as those weighted by anxiety. Waiting hours become days as they pass with leaden feet, and weeks might be years, so slowly they move away. Thus Gloria found the time during which she had to wait drag heavily past. Christmas came and went, but though there were festivities at the Mine, for Gloria there seemed to be no happiness, for neither she nor her family felt they could join in the sports or merriment, and it was not until Claas had been employed some weeks at the mine that she heard anything from him. Then it happened that one night, after she had retired to bed, but not to sleep, she heard a gentle tapping at her window. Hastily jumping out of bed, she threw a dressing-gown around her, and slipped her feet into slippers. Crossing the room, she threw up the window and looked out, and soon discovered the dark face of Claas peering out from amongst the bushes. Apparently he had tapped at her window, which was situated at the back of the house, and then crept away into cover, and was now waiting to find out if she had heard or not. Gloria had no wish to awaken the rest of the inmates, and her window being quite near the ground, she stepped out. She had no fear that any of the natives would do her any harm, and certainly not Claas.

Leaving her window open, she beckoned to Claas, and then walked a few steps to the left of the house, where the pepper trees afforded shadow. She did not expect that anyone in or near the house would be

awake at that hour. Still, she did not wish to be seen by any native who might be walking across the veld, and, thanks to the moonlight, see her. It was absolutely necessary for the success of her scheme that no one should see her talking to Claas at present; for the natives are fond of gossip, and Claas as a spy would be useless, once it was known that he gave information of any kind to any inmate of his late employer's house.

With much hesitation and choosing of words, and nodding of his head, Claas told Gloria that he had been watching the big white baas at the machine.

It is customary on a Diamond Mine that should any of the boys pick up a diamond while at work in the mine, that he shall at once hand it to his overseer, and in due time he receives for that stone a bonus according to the weight and value of the diamond, which is, however, far below the actual value of the diamond, but only a percentage. This is done in order to encourage honesty amongst the boys, and to prevent them concealing any such stones about their person, in order to try and sell at some future time to an illicit diamond buyer. All buyers of rough and uncut diamonds must have licences, and are only allowed by law to buy from those authorised to sell. But many are the tricks the boys are up to in order to secret the diamonds and obtain a price higher than the bonus paid by the owners, and all the boys on leaving the mine at the end of their three or five months' contract, have to live and sleep for a week in a detention house, where all their belongings are taken from them to be carefully searched, and even if they have swallowed diamonds, during a week's time of detention this ruse gets found out as a rule. Gloria gathered from what Claas told her that King Snyman was in the habit of taking from certain of the natives any diamonds they had found, and it was understood that he would pay them about double what they were likely to get as a bonus, if the diamonds should be handed in in the usual manner. King Snyman had a Cape boy (a half-caste) who helped

him and seemed to be a sort of go-between with the natives and King Snyman, who never paid the natives the same day he received the stones, but always the next, because he feared that if he paid the same day he might get caught by the detectives, whereas if he went out with the diamonds on him and should happen to be caught, he could easily say that the stones had been handed him to be delivered at the Mine Office, and that he had forgotten to deliver them and request that the bonus be paid to the boy from whom he had received them. In this way there was the boy who found the diamond as a witness to corroborate his story. On the other hand, if he got the diamonds out safely, then the next day the Cape boy gave the boys who picked up the diamonds the money, and no one was any the wiser. Claas was also under the impression that only certain of the boys had these dealings with King Snyman, whereas other boys he did not know well and who found diamonds he offered nothing to, but handed in all stones they should happen to find to the Mine Office in the usual way, and in consequence no one seemed to regard him with suspicion.

Gloria bade Claas make good friends with this Cape boy, as thus he might the better be able to find out more. She also told Claas that the young baas she was to marry was now in prison, falsely charged with stealing diamonds, and as Claas had so far proved his trustworthiness, she told him about the can having been found with the diamonds inside. She bade Claas do his best and find out more, and added fervently:

"Oh, Claas, if only you help me and find out much! much! more, then someday I will give you a cow, Claas."

The native boy (married men are termed "boys" the same as the single ones) grinned broadly, and shook his head as he said:

"Ja, missus; Claas help the missus; but missus no got cows now. That not matter, Claas help missus very good."

"But I can get more cows some day, Claas. You

see, we have one cow now, but there are others in the world. I will buy one in the market some day, Claas. A wonderful cow, giving twenty-five bottles* of milk."

"Ja, missus," said Claas, and then Gloria dismissed him, and she went back to bed.

The next morning she told her father what she had heard from Claas, but he did not think it could possibly be true. He advised her, however, to find an early opportunity and tell Mr. Hillier, and see what he had to say about the matter.

Gloria therefore went to the manager's house at the time when he was likely to have come in from the mine for lunch. Mrs. Hillier was out, and Gloria saw him alone for a few minutes.

Gloria told her story, but did not mention the name of Claas, merely describing him as a native whom she had known for a long time, but Mr. Hillier insisted that if he was to help her at all he must know every detail, especially the boy's name, for he said:

"You know, Gloria, I want to help both you and Martino, but I must be just, and be quite frank with you. I am afraid this native is lying. A boy will usually say anything if he thinks he is going to get any reward. This white man he accused, King Snyman, for instance. He has now been some months in the mine, and I have never heard the faintest breath of suspicion against him. Further, he was personally recommended by one of the directors, who, I believe, has known him for some years; so, you see, it is difficult for me to believe your story. Still, I will keep an open mind and watch the matter myself if you give me this boy's name, and I will promise you that no harm shall come to this boy, no matter what he has so far told you, unless I can adequately prove that he deserves punishment, and even then I will naturally respect your confidence, and keep your name

* Milk is calculated by bottles in S. Africa, a bottle being a little more than a pint.

out of the matter. I am as anxious as you are that the mystery surrounding this case shall be cleared up. Now what is this boy's name?"

"Claas. He used to live at Clevedon Farm. He and his family and his father's family before him; some of his tribe seem to have been there ever since there was such a farm, but nothing would induce him to remain when we left. He said a curse had come over the farm, and he and all his people trekked away and made their home on some other farm, where the owner was very glad to have them, for Claas is a good worker, and his brothers and cousins work there too. He did not tell his new employers why he left. I fancy they think he has gone to look at the Sand Veld, meaning to take his people there for the harvesting next year. Anyway, he now works in the mine at the machine, but sleeps outside the compound, as he only signed on as an extra boy and would not sign a three months' contract. He was well spoken of, and therefore has his pass for going backwards and forward. Father spoke to the compound manager and the head guard about him, and vouched for his honesty; so he is often employed outside the mine, doing odd jobs and paid overtime for it by the Recreation Club, for, as you know, the mine is so short of boys there are not many to do any work outside."

"I know, worse luck! Well, anyway, you can rely on me. I will see into the matter at once. You will stay to lunch, won't you? My wife has not gone far; she will be back directly."

"No, thank you; if you don't mind. I stay all I can with mother just now. She is not exactly ill, but, well, I feel that if I am not at Pietsrust looking after Louis, I ought to be at home taking care of mother and Johannes. He says if I am not in for meals it is so dull, poor mite. You would easily know Claas by the fact that he has only one ear; the other was bitten off by a pig when he was a tiny boy."

"Well, I will look out for him. Good-bye, Gloria. You are a good girl. I will do all I can for you, but keep a level head, and don't be carried away too much

by what the boy Claas says. Also tell no one anything further you may hear, not even your father."

They shook hands, and Gloria returned to her home.

Shortly after lunch Mr. Hillier went across to his office, and having dictated a few letters and telegrams to the Secretary, he took his hat and strolled round the surface of the mine, and then paused near the machine; he soon saw the boy with one ear, and he concluded he must be Claas, and, waiting for an opportunity when the men and boys near him had their attention distracted, he past close to Claas, and whispered to him to be at the back door of the hospital that night at eight o'clock. Then in a loud voice he said, "Now then, boy, get on with your work. You are not paid to stare about you."

"Ja, baas," replied Claas, and no further word was said. Claas was cute enough to understand the pretended anger of the "big baas," and went on with his work.

That evening punctually at eight o'clock Claas was at the back entrance to the hospital, where he found a police boy, who told him to come along and follow him very quietly. They walked in a roundabout way to the Manager's house; it was almost quite dark, and they waited in the garden under the trees. Soon the Manager appeared with Gloria at his side. The police boy was told to go away and wait at the front door. The Manager then started to cross-examine Claas on what he had previously told Gloria, but it was not until Gloria had ordered him to reply that he did so, for much as he feared the big white baas, he still regarded the word of a Fairbain as of greater authority.

After much questioning, Mr. Hillier came to the conclusion that there must be some truth in the statement made by Claas, and he further elucidated the fact that the illicit diamond transactions took place as often as three or four times a week, but Claas was of the opinion that it would be "plenty hard" to catch Baas Snyman, as he never took a stone from a boy he did not know well, always employing the Cape boy to do so instead.

Mr. Hillier then told Claas to continue his observations, but not to say a word to anyone, and he would later on give him a sign to tell him when to come to the house to again report what he had seen or heard. The police boy was then called, and the two natives left the garden by a side gate.

The next day Mr. Hillier set two native detectives to watch the machine, and all that went on there, but without mentioning the name of either Snyman or Claas to them, and it was not long before they confirmed Claas's story.

This so far seemed easy sailing, but how to bring the crime home to King Snyman? It is one thing to know a truth; it is often another to prove it. And even if King Snyman should be proved guilty of I.D.B., that threw no light on the mystery of the diamonds found in Martino's can, and did not show any evidence as to whether he was or was not guilty. But Mr. Hillier naturally was now as interested in the case of King Snyman as he was in that of Martino. As General Manager of a diamond mine it behoved him to be as much a detective as he was an engineer, or surveyor, or good organiser. The leakage of diamonds from a mine is a serious matter, affecting eventually both the supply and especially the price.

But how to bring his guilt home to King Snyman? It would be next to impossible to trap him, as he would have the excuse of not having yet handed over the diamonds, and demanding the bonus for the boy he had had them from. He could not be charged on suspicion; juries are sometimes what a learned South African Judge has been known to call "unsatisfactory," especially in rural districts, where the juries are usually Africanders. One may bring many cases to court, but the obtaining of a conviction is another matter.

A few days later Mr. Vancohn came down to the mine; ostensibly he had to see to various matters with regard to the newly-acquired property, Farm Clevedon, and also the Luilekkerland Co. had asked him

to see what could be done to postpone or reduce the claim of Petrus Dutoit for the sum he claimed for the discovery rights. Petrus Dutoit was making Pietersrust his headquarters for the time being, and before proceeding out to the Vuurklip Mine, Mr. Vancohn had an interview with Dutoit at the New Hotel there.

Petrus Dutoit had not improved in any way with his fortune. There are people who deteriorate with the acquisition of riches; they become stingy with regard to their friends, and self-indulgent to themselves. Dutoit belonged to this class. Never generous in spirit or in deed, he now was becoming almost miserly in his habits. The first flush of vanity at being able to "treat" having been appeased, he now expected to be "treated," and would order drink for himself at any bar, heedless of the fact that friends of his were also present. The arrogance of possession was now his, and he demanded homage on account of what he had rather than what he did, and having without work obtained so much money, he saw no reason why he could not obtain more, and that by any means in his power; therefore, when Mr. Vancohn pointed out to him that there were many difficulties in the way of his obtaining anything like the sum he claimed for the discovery rights, he listened with an evil leer upon his face, and then said:

"Either I get that money or I will show your company the letter you once gave me when you wanted the Clevedon deal on your own."

"My letter?" To tell the truth it had for the time faded from Vancohn's memory, and when in a few words Petrus Dutoit went on to explain, Vancohn stopped him angrily, and said:

"You blackguard, so you have that letter still, although the deal is over, and you have got your money. You will hand that letter back to me, and that at once."

"Ach, nee, not if I know it. Get me the discovery rights money, and then we will start talking."

"And you dare to threaten to show it?"

"Ja."

"What would that benefit you?"

"Nought, but it would down you, and so that letter is worth money to me."

"Money? So it is money you want, is it? Do you know, my friend, that is blackmail?"

"Is that what you call it? Well, since you've probably done a bit at that game yourself in your time, you must know it means money. You had flies on you, Vancohn, when you gave me that letter, flies and lots of 'em."

"But I trusted you then."

"No, you didn't. But you thought I was too green to know the value, and that it was just a bit of pap for a baby, and I would give it you back when I got that £35 thou., and then you went and forgot all about it. But I didn't. That letter means you will get me the discovery rights money, and then maybe I will sell you the letter for a thousand quid, and yet again maybe I wont. Ach, I'm no Jew, and I'm no lawyer, but there aint flies on me, Vancohn, not much."

"You!"

"Ach, nee, not so loud, and no language. I am respected, I am, in this hotel, and I can pay for what I have with anyone. I don't share a farm no more, I don't, or have to be small potatoes to anyone. No, I'm a toff. Isn't that good English? Now, I'm dry, and when I'm dry I drink, and I can afford to drink what I like and when I like. I aint beholden to no one, I aint. I'll see you again when you are more civil. Remember, I am a man of my word, and I'll bet a bag of mealies to a chew of tobacco you know it by now. So long." And without waiting for a further word from Mr. Vancohn, Petrus Dutoit slouched out of the smoking-room where they had been talking, and went into the bar.

Mr. Vancohn lost no further time in Pietsrust. He had telephoned to the mine that he would require the car, and now the motor having just arrived, it was snorting outside the hotel, and he sent out word that he would be ready in five minutes, if the chauffeur would like to have a drink in the meanwhile.

As usual, Mr. Vancohn put up at the Manager's house for the night, but Mr. Hillier did not tell him a word about his suspicions of King Snyman, thinking it best to say nothing until further proof could be obtained, for although Mr. Vancohn had recommended King Snyman to the mine, still that was no reason why he should know much about his personal character. He might have used his influence merely to oblige some relative of Snyman's. A director of a company was liable to receive requests of many and various kinds. Besides, Mr. Hillier had neither regard nor admiration for Mr. Vancohn, and discussed things as little as possible with him, disliking his conceit and mistrusting his suave manner.

The next morning Mr. Vancohn visited the mine. He knew little of the technical side of the mine, but was supposed to find a certain amount of fascination in its various workings. Mr. Hillier had always concluded that the only reason why Mr. Vancohn visited the mine at all was sheer swank, because as a director he could not be refused admittance, and he liked to patronise the employees by a few suave remarks. His business with the Manager usually related to financial matters, and this took up very little of his time. In fact, Mr. Hillier had often thought that Mr. Vancohn hardly earned his travelling expenses, charged of course to the Company, and wondered why he had wasted so much time, although Mr. Vancohn had frequently remarked that, being so delicate, his doctor had again and again assured him that he should go to the Vuurklip as often as possible, as even sleeping one night at that different altitude did him so much good, to say nothing of the long motor drives, which freshened him up after the stuffiness of his dusty office in Johannesburg. So Mr. Hillier thought nothing of Mr. Vancohn deciding to take a walk round the surface of the mine during the morning before he drove back to Pietsrust. When they shook hands at parting, Mr. Hillier was tempted to tell him about King Snyman, but again put the thought from him, for it seemed still impossible that what Claas had said

could be true, for though Mr. Hillier had set further detectives to work, as he was eager to find out, if possible, how King Snyman sent the stolen diamonds away, and although, unknown to him, his linen was searched when it went to be washed, all his communications at the Post Office chronicled and any parcel opened privately, and all his actions watched, still no trace could be found of any diamonds leaving. Either Claas and the two native detectives must be mistaken, or King Snyman was a very clever rogue, for now, not only the native detectives, but also white ones had been warned to watch him, but nothing could they ascertain, either about King Snyman or the friends he associated with. He never entered any suspicious wayside stores; in fact, he did nothing that could in any way give rise to suspicion.

So what was the use of mentioning him to Mr. Vancohn? Suspicions are such vague, uncertain instruments, and dangerous to use carelessly.

Having waved adieu to the smiling suave lawyer, Mr. Hillier strode across to his house, thinking that as it would so soon be lunch time, he might as well go over now, instead of returning to his office. Mr. Vancohn had declined to remain for lunch; he seemed in a great hurry to get back to Pietsrust, and before leaving had only partaken of a few sandwiches and milk and soda, explaining that milk seemed to agree with him better than whiskey.

Not far from the gateway leading to his garden, Mr. Hillier met the mine doctor and stopped for a chat.

Dr. Watson was a man much beloved on the mine, by white and black alike, and took more than a merely medical interest in his patients. Everyone, in fact, regarded him as a friend. After they had discussed a rather bad fracture of a boy taken in that morning, Dr. Watson remarked:

"So I am to have a hospital garden, eh? That is nice."

"A garden?" asked Mr. Hillier.

"Yes; a boy, Claas, told me this morning that you

had said that there was to be a flower bed made outside the hospital, the work to be done by the convalescents."

"Well, I did, or rather my wife, did say something about it. But what has that to do with Claas? And who, by the way, is he?"

"A boy working at the machine. He stopped me as I passed him just now, and he said, 'Please, doctor, will you tell Baas Hillier that I will go for the plants for the Hospital garden at eight o'clock to-night.'"

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, yes, of course, Claas, I remember now. He used to work on a farm, I fancy, and I suppose that is why the idea of a garden interests him. Well, he shall have his plants. Good-bye, doctor."

"Good-bye, Mr. Hillier."

"Now I wonder why Claas is coming to-night?" pondered Hillier. "Must be important, or he would never have thought of coming before I sent for him. What can it mean?"

CHAPTER XXX

FEARING that perhaps Claas would not speak unless Gloria was present, and not wishing to waste time, Mr. Hillier sent a note to Gloria by a police boy asking her to be in the garden at the back of his house a few minutes before eight, but if she would like to come to dinner first, to do so by all means. She knew that they dined at 7.15 or thereabouts, and Mrs. Hillier had a plate and knife and fork always at her disposal. So Gloria, not knowing how otherwise to explain her absence to her parents, said she had received a dinner invitation from Mrs. Hillier, and at seven o'clock she put on her Sunday dress and walked across to the Manager's house.

Mr. Hillier during the afternoon requested the garden boy to fill a basket with plants, geraniums, pansies and such-like hardy flowers easy to transplant, and these were waiting for Claas to carry away, so that he might duly deliver them to the doctor the next morning.

"Oh, dear. I feel like a conspirator out of a book," sighed Gloria, as she walked in the garden with Tom Hillier, both having hurried through dinner, for neither could conceal their impatience. So much so that Mrs. Hillier had observed that though she felt they were bursting to tell her everything, they should not. Would they instead please wait until the whole story should be completed, as she hated stories left to be continued in our next.

"Yes, I used to think it must be lovely to have real adventures, and be a heroine and have mysterious meetings with pirates who were princes in disguise. I find I don't like it a bit," Gloria continued.

"No, we rarely like that which we have got to go through I suppose, and always think someone else

has a far happier lot," replied Mr. Hillier. "But still, I have never yet met another man I would honestly like to change with."

"No, and if I were asked would I like another nose, or different eyes, I really should not know which to choose. I should be so frightened of matching up wrong, so I suppose it is a good thing we have no choice in the matter. Look! Isn't that Claas yonder? He is wriggling through the trees like a black snake. I think cats must have been natives once; they are equally graceful and agile. Yes, it is Claas. Oh, I wonder what he will tell us."

The native had not chosen this time to come through the gate, but having scaled a wall on one side of the small plantation of blue-gum trees, he had wriggled through, always on the alert, in case anyone should be hiding in the long grass watching him, for one never knows on or near a diamond mine who watches who, or what might happen if an unexpected arrest took place. The element of tragedy is ever lurking near a mine, be it of gold or diamonds, and Mr. Hillier never walked about at night without his revolver in his pocket.

The story that Claas had to tell them was such that they were amazed. In short it amounted to this: Mr. Vancohn had that morning strolled past the machine twice, looking about him, and waiting apparently until he thought King Snyman was alone. So at last he seemed to be, but Claas had, unobserved, gone up on to the top of the elevator, and from there he was able to see without being seen. From this position he saw Mr. Vancohn approach King Snyman, they both glanced casually round them, and then Mr. Vancohn offered King Snyman his open cigarette case. King Snyman took a cigarette and at the same time dropped *some diamonds into the case*. They then stood about and smoked, but when the cigarette King Snyman was smoking was only half burnt away, he took it from his mouth and threw it into the washing-pan, then casually put his fingers into his waistcoat pocket without seeming to take anything

therefrom. But Mr. Vancohn immediately offered him another cigarette, and into the case King Snyman dropped more stones as he took another cigarette. Altogether King Snyman took three cigarettes, but Claas had no idea how many stones he put into the case in return. The case appeared to have been a large one. It probably was specially lined, for the stones seemed to make no sound, though with the noise of the machinery going, that might have been difficult to detect. But Claas from his seat on high was able with his wonderful eyes to plainly see the stones in the case before the case was casually closed. Yes, he would swear to having seen the stones, and was equally certain that three lots had been placed in the case by King Snyman when taking cigarettes. The cigarettes were all on one side of the case; the other seemed to be vacant and a different colour.

"Lined with chamois leather one side probably," thought Hillier to himself. Then he bade Claas tell no one of what he had seen from the elevator, and told him he would later on be well rewarded for his evidence, if it should be proved to be correct.

At this point Gloria interrupted Mr. Hillier, and motioning Claas to stand a few paces away, she said:

"Now, Mr. Hillier, doesn't it seem to you that these men being guilty, they wanted to throw suspicion on someone, and so chose Louis?"

"Gloria, you may think so, but I doubt if any judge and jury would agree with you. You must not forget that the diamonds were found in Martino's can, and that Snyman and Martino do not work anywhere near each other, the one down below, the other above. It therefore does not seem to me possible that Snyman could have tampered with Martino's can. They do not even leave the mine together, for Martino has to stay to see to the blasting."

"And Mr. Vancohn?"

"Well, it is certainly impossible that he could have had anything to do with the cans; he was not even at Vuurklip that day. And I can hardly credit what Claas says, too, about the cigarette case. Yet it

is too clever a story for him to have invented, and certainly explains how Snyman might have got rid of the diamonds purchased from the boys. And to think, if this is true, that Vancohn had them on him to-day when he left? And he a director of the mine. Oh, it is beyond me!"

"Don't you think that if neither Mr. Vancohn nor King Snyman put the diamonds in the can, they might have bribed someone else to?" asked Gloria. "Who else touches the cans?"

"The guard who examines them and the piccanin who collects them."

"Then would it not be a good plan for Claas to make friends with the piccanin and see if he can find out if he has been bribed?" asked Gloria.

"No man would be such a fool as to bribe a piccanin. Children talk too much."

"Still, I think it would be wise to try and find out," said Gloria, and Hillier replied with a shrug of his shoulders:

"As you like, but I doubt if it will do any good. I seem to have got a pretty nest of villains on the mine, and I prided myself I had weeded most of the rotters out. It is generally cheaper in the long run to dismiss a suspect than try and commit him, but I fear I cannot start dismissing directors. I really don't know what to do. Have patience and wait, I suppose that it is all one can do. Claas, come here!"

"Ja, baas," answered back the voice of the waiting native.

"Claas, do you know the piccanin who collects the cans round the mine and the machine? The coffee cans of the white men?"

"Yes, no, baas."

"Yes, no; what does that mean?"

"I've seed him."

"Oh, I understand. You have seen him, but you don't talk, eh?"

"Ja, baas."

"Well, get to know him, talk and find out if any white baas ever gives him anything."

"Ja, baas."

"Are all the cans alike?" asked Gloria.

"Mostly. They don't vary much, being made in wholesale numbers and sold at any store on or near a mine. Why?" continued Hillier.

"Because I would like to know if the can of King Snyman is anything like the can of Louis Martino. And yes, this seems to me most important of all! I wonder if the lid of King Snyman's can really fits well!"

"By Jove, yes, there is really something in that, though not much, I fear. Gloria, you are trying to rival Sherlock Holmes. Now, Claas?"

"Ja, baas."

"When you are with the piccanin, find out if the lid of Baas Snyman's can fits well. Goes in easily, so," and Hillier did a little pantomime with his hands.

"Ja, baas, ja," responded Claas grinning. "If you send me for snuff I will not bring ashes."*

Then Mr. Hillier told Claas to take the plants put up in the basket for him, and to come back again in three days time at the same hour.

When he had gone, Mr. Hillier observed:

"Well, Gloria, we seem to be unravelling mysteries, but not altogether those we want."

"And yet each may fit into the other like a puzzle, I suppose," Gloria replied. "And you cannot think how grateful I am for all the trouble you are taking."

"Oh, no thanks please. I want to help you. Yes, but also for the sake of the mine I must find out all I can, but how to bring anything home to . . . , well, even in a garden names are awkward balls to play with. They bounce away beyond bounds, don't they? But you know who I mean. It seems incredible. For Heaven's sake, Gloria, say nothing until I give you permission to do so. I can see a hell of a mess ahead, and cannot see how it is going to be explained away."

* A native proverb.

"But surely a thief is a thief, and an I.D.B. is a criminal, no matter what his position," said Gloria.

"Quite so. But a King is never treated quite the same as a common soldier, even if he should get taken prisoner, and a director of a company has sometimes to be shielded for the sake of the company itself. I must think the matter well over, and shall do nothing until I hear further. Good-night, Gloria, or would you rather I walked across to your home with you? But of course I will, and have a smoke on the way, so run in and say good-bye to Alice and we will be off."

Three days later Claas reported that, finding that the piccanin was of the same tribe as himself, he had made his acquaintance and gained his friendship easily. The piccanin denied ever having been bribed, and seemed unable to give any light on the subject of the cans, but Claas had been able to examine the lid of Snyman's can and found that it did not fit too well on to the top. It was a little tight in one position, and there were dents in the lid that did not correspond to similar marks on the can itself.

Mr. Hillier now gave Gloria permission to see Mr. Francis Layton, who had come to Pietsrust to question Martino, in order to instruct counsel on his behalf, and Gloria told the story of the cans to Mr. Layton, who, however, did not attach a great deal of importance to the matter, for as he truly observed, "Cans can easily get bent and dented if they are in constant use, especially in a mine." He, however, told her to warn Claas not to touch again the can, or to rouse the suspicion of King Snyman in any way.

Gloria had another interview with Louis Martino, and this meeting made her very unhappy, for the detention seemed to be depressing Martino's spirits, and it was as much as she could do to comfort him.

"I seem to feel that my luck is dead out," said Louis dejectedly. "And if I don't get out of this with a clean slate, well, Gloria, you are better without me."

But Gloria would not let him say much in this strain, and vowed she would wait for him if he should be in gaol ten years. Then in order to change his thoughts she told him about her mother, and how she had told them of the discovery of the diamonds on Farm Clevedon so long ago, and still had the diamonds, and the date on which they were found."

"But they should have been given up then to the nearest magistrate, even if they were on their own farm; at least, I think so," Louis observed.

"Well, father is seeing Mr. Layton about the matter this week," said Gloria. "He has seen him once already, and he says there are many points he has to look into and consider, but in the meantime the Luilekkerland Co. are also delaying matters, and Oom Petrus cannot get them to pay him any money it seems. But oh, Louis, this does not count at all in comparison with your case. What will be the use of money if you are not with us? You must, you shall be free, and don't lose heart. How silly I am. One moment I say if you are not free, and then I tell you not to lose heart, of course you will be free."

"But, Gloria, if I am not, and if you win this other case, you will have, or could have, a fine position in life. You might find some chap better off or more suitable for you then. He couldn't love you more than I, God knows that, but I love you so, Gloria, I'd rather shoot myself than stand in your light."

Gloria wanted so much to throw her arms around his neck and howl on his shoulder when he said these words, but she was a braver girl than that. She knew the best way to meet his tragic tone was with comedy, so she cried:

"Louis, be quiet at once. I won't listen to you. I will, yes, if you are not good and smile at once, I will have a breach of promise case against you for daring to hint about giving me up, and we have cases on hand enough at present, goodness knows. Or I will, yes, I will marry King Snyman, and Oom Petrus shall be best man! Now, you absurd creature, can you picture such happiness as that?"

"It is all very well to laugh, Gloria, and you are a brick and all that, but this affair will about break me in more ways than one. I will never work at the Vuurklip again, never. I would rather sell boot laces, and all my few savings will go fast. Legal expenses play the deuce with one's purse."

"But if you get off, Louis, and, of course, you will, then not you will pay the expenses surely, but the Vuurklip for falsely accusing you?"

"I don't know. I only wish it was five minutes after the verdict had been given. Even certainty of ruin is better than this waiting. Don't stay any longer, Gloria. I am in a black mood to-day, and I shall only depress you."

"I shall stay until I am turned out, Louis," Gloria replied, "and you must tell me all about the counsel engaged for you, and what Mr. Layton says; he tells me so little."

"There is very little to tell. That is the worst of it; just the damning evidence of guilt and nothing further. Even with the best of wishes, my counsel cannot tell me I am certain of getting off, but he says it so often happens that something unexpected turns up at the last minute."

"Yes," said Gloria. "And I know that Mr. Hillier will do his best for you, Louis. He is making enquiries in many ways, I know, but he has forbidden me to speak of some things even to you, as he says he may be on a false scent."

"What scent? Can't you tell me that, Gloria?"

"No, Louis. I have given my word, and a woman must not break her word even to the man she loves."

"You are right, dear. It is no use giving me a cloud to sit on to-day just to find it isn't strong enough to hold me up to-morrow. I must wait, and thank goodness the waiting is now nearly over."

Mr. Hillier was indeed doing his best to unravel the mysteries of crime at the mine, but found that in this particular case he could do little. He would like to have been able to make a plan capable of bringing both King Snyman and Mr. Vancohn to book, but

did not know how to do so. There was no evidence to prove that Vancohn was a receiver of stolen diamonds except the word of one native, and although Mr. Hillier was now fully convinced in his own mind that King Snyman was guilty of I.D.B., he could not at present be caught in such a way that conviction could be with certainty expected, because the diamonds must be actually found in the possession of the accused.

Amongst many other things, Mr. Hillier also had a good look at the test stone register, to see if many test stones were missing, because he thought that, as these stones were handed to King Snyman to be placed in the machine, he might keep some of them, and the other departments would conclude that they were lost. The register showed that during the last three months, out of 95 tests made, only on three occasions the test stones were recorded as lost. This, at any rate, did not look as if King Snyman was helping himself to test stones.

The one stone lost was a small white nearly square stone weighing about five-eighths of a carat; the next one lost was a fine glassy octahedron, beautifully white, with a peculiar spot in the centre, thereby being so well marked that the stone could at any time be easily recognised. This stone had been missing for four weeks. The next stone missing was the favourite test stone, a small three-cornered mackel, with one corner slightly broken away in an oblique shape and a brown spot in the other corner and a black spot in the third corner. It weighed just under half a carat, and had been lost since three weeks.

The test stone register did not indicate thefts; quite to the contrary. Mr. Hillier began to think that Claas and the two native detectives must be mistaken, or that King Snyman was a very cunning rogue indeed.

In two days the Circuit Court would be held at Pietsrust. What would be the result?

CHAPTER XXXI

THE sun still shines though our loved ones die, the birds chirp as merrily in a cemetery as elsewhere, and if any great event comes into one's life, an event tragic in its grave intensity, no part of nature breathlessly awaits the result. Even the men and women around us go on with their usual occupations. It is natural to them, to us it seems cruel—a birth means trade, a death means trade, and a law case again trade. It all goes to make up life, and the loss of this creature's relations means the butcher's bill of that undertaker gets a chance of being paid, while Circuit Court being held in a small town is certainly good for trade all around, and clean curtains will be put up in the hotel, the shops will plaster their goods with fresh tickets; even a theatrical company may pause a week and give performances at the town hall, and women get out their best clothes and wish they were new, and the men change their collars more often than usual, and the Boers—some of them actually put collars on, for the holding of the Circuit Court is almost as much a festival as the *Nachtmaal* (Annual Communion) of the Dutch Reformed Church.

It was a fine morning in Pietsrust on the day that Louis Martino was to stand his trial, a morning not only filled with sunshine, for sunshine alone does not make a fine morning in South Africa, but there was no wind, and only those who have experienced the scourge of wind "out there" can appreciate this. There would be great heat during the day, yes, but heat can be borne, without the awful wind that dries up one's marrow, and blinds one's eyes with dust as hard as sand. The lined, wrinkled, wizened faces of the women who live in South Africa are due more to

wind than sun; also the bloodshot eyes of both men and women.

Life seemed early astir, for many visitors were expected to come in from the outlying districts, and at dawn the house boys were busy with buckets and mops at the hotels, cleaning the fronts and swilling passages, and making all the clatter without which natives do not seem to be able to work, their tongues wagging as quickly as their hands, for there are two things natives are never tired of doing, talking and eating. Their tongues truly are never still, always being busy with either one or the other occupation. The voices of natives are usually thick and heavy sounding, all the more so when they talk in their own Kaffir language.

Heavy ox-waggon, pulled by eighteen bullocks, rumbled through the streets coming from the railway station. The Hottentot driver, with his long whip, marching alongside of the wheelers or "achterosse," every now and then shouting to one of the bullocks, "Scotchman." There is no team of oxen without a "Scotchman," though why, no one seems to know. In front the "leide," a picannin of six or seven years old, is leading the "voorosse" of the team. He pulls a strip of raw hide, which is fastened to the horns of the front bullocks. He is clothed completely in a pair of trousers, the top of which he has fastened up around his neck with bits of string. He is proud of his attire, and thinks himself a most important person. Even the bullocks seem to agree with him in this opinion, for they patiently follow him like lambs wherever he tries to pull them, this way and then that, and so the tiny Kaffir boy leads on.

As the morning advances and dawn turns to full sunlight, Cape carts begin to come in from all directions, their occupants being all clad in their best clothes as though they were going to a wedding or a festival. The men have been summoned to serve as jurors in the Circuit Court, and their wives and children accompanying them, deeming the occasion a fitting one for a holiday.

The Judge had arrived the night before by the train, and was a guest of the Resident Magistrate. Many attorneys also accompanied one or two counsels, both K.C.'s, and were already installed at the principal hotels, not far from the Court House, which was a small white-washed building with a flagstaff, from which floated the Union Jack.

Dilapidated cabs appeared from one knew not where, looking as though they had been dug out of the years long dead, and smelling as evilly as they looked. Bleary eyed red-nosed men appeared mounted on the box seats, and held the reins of ungroomed horses loosely in their hands, the men having the appearance of having been resurrected from soiled pictures of sporting bar lounges; these elegant drivers never seemed to do any work except on race days and when Circuit Court was being held. One wondered how they lived during the intervals. Perhaps they were preserved in the spirits they imbibed.

A motley crowd began to assemble in front of the Court House, for many farmers who were not serving as jurymen had also come to town and brought their families with them, and people in every rank of life in Pietsrust were out and about, agape for gossip and full of curiosity about everyone and everything. On these occasions the Editor of the "Pietsrust Herald" or "Boeren Courant" was a very busy man, and engaged extra reporters, and sometimes even brought out a special edition of the bi-weekly paper, and actually had news to insert without having to rely only on some wonderful ointment, or an all-curing pill, such advertisements being interlaced with incidents culled from a Johannesburg or Capetown paper, or the notice of a sale of cattle, or an abusive article on the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. because they did not present to the townspeople of Pietsrust nineteen shillings and elevenpence three-farthings out of every pound they made.

Yes, certainly, the "Pietsrust Herald" was a great paper and a power in the land, and the Editor second to none, save perhaps King George and the Prime

Minister of South Africa, but as neither of these gentlemen resided in Pietsrust, then surely the Editor of the "Pietsrust Herald" was the greatest man there, and since there was no other paper published, then, with the clergy, he held the right to hold one-sided conversations with the public.

The dilapidated cabs did quite good business as they picked up fares at hotels and carried them the length of the principal street, about a thousand yards, and charged 2s. for the journey, a lot of money for so short a drive, but the sun was getting hotter every minute, and such a conveyance as an omnibus or tram was unknown in Pietsrust, excepting the hotel omnibuses, which were only used to meet the trains and carry passengers from thence to the hotels.

Outside the Courthouse were groups of fat Boer women, clad mostly in black, or black skirts trailing on the dusty pavement, and light blouses, their ample figures displaying large protruding stomachs, rounded backs, which seemed to be of the same shapes as their bosoms, short necks, and hair, lank and straight, severely drawn off their foreheads and screwed up with a couple of hairpins behind their heads in a small knob; their faces were weather-beaten and mostly ugly, their ages difficult to guess, unless one judged by their hats, for those over forty seemed to don hideous hats of sombre hues, while the younger ones sported equally hideous headgear, but of light colours, adorned with flowers mostly, though here and there a feather, almost, though not quite, out of curl, was displayed. The young girls were nearly all clad in light attire, and had no beauty save the freshness of youth; yet even that freshness seemed but a faded sunburnt, uncared-for parody on youth. They were all watching the nobodies, who thought they were somebodies, arrive, and discussed naturally what every woman wore, and the family history of each woman or man.

On the other side of the road, sitting on the ground in the shade of a wall, a group of Kaffirs and Kaffir-women also discussed the affairs of those who passed

by, or, unlike the Boer women, had intervals of saying nothing, but just looking on at the arrivals as though awed into unusual silence by the presentation of an unusual side of life.

The witnesses for the prosecution and the defence arrived and passed into the Court house. Then in a corner of the stoep, which surrounded the Court house, a group of men gathered. One was an attorney, still discussing with his clients the best means of inducing the jury to pronounce a non-guilty in a flagrant delit case, whereas, in another group, an attorney was rehearsing his witnesses, an incident seeming impossible to English ideas, yet not at all unusual in South Africa, where the Judge knows of it, the counsel on either side know of it, and maybe even practise it themselves, and therefore it is not unusual to hear in court such a question asked as, "Have you learnt your lesson well?" or "When were you told to make this statement?"

Already the sun was scorching in its heat, although the hour was but a few minutes before nine o'clock, when the spider* of the Resident Magistrate drove up to a side entrance, and the Judge, his clerk, and the Magistrate alighted and entered the Court buildings. Then the crowd outside the building began to dwindle away. Most of the people went in to hear the cases; the fact that the accused were unknown to the majority mattered not. Circuit Court was considered in the light of a free circus. The drama was there waiting for all, and no charge made.

The Court was held in a long narrow hall, just such a building as one sees used as a Methodist Chapel in a small country place in England, the windows being of plain glass and fairly high up on either side so that one could not look out at any outside attraction, and very little light filtered in. The hall was, in fact, very badly lighted, and the acoustics worse. One had to almost shout to be heard at all, unless accustomed to producing a voice under many varied con-

* A four-wheeled open carriage.

ditions. Thus the first impression one received in the hall was that of a dismal dreariness and muffled voices. At the end of the hall was a raised platform with a desk and a chair. On the wall behind the chair an old painting of the King was hung so low that it was half hidden by the head of the Judge when he sat in the chair.

In front of this small platform was a table for the Judge's clerk, who acted as Registrar.

A little further forward stood another table, on which were three cigar boxes and a number of papers and books. This was the table of the Sheriff, the most important man on the Circuit. In front of his table stood a long table with about twenty chairs, while up against the wall on the right was the jurors' enclosure, five chairs in front, and four higher ones at the back, and between this enclosure and the Judge, a raised box for the witnesses. The interpreter sat along side of it. Behind the long table was another raised box, where the accused stood during the trial. A railing divided this portion of the hall from the other and larger part, where rows of benches were provided for the public.

So down-hearted had Louis Martino been the day previous to the hearing of the charge against him that he had begged Gloria when he saw her for a few brief minutes not to be present in the Court, for he had said that if disgrace was to be his, then it would utterly unman him to know that Gloria was present. She had begged him to let her go, but in vain. On that point he was adamant, and so she had left him in the belief that she would acquiesce in his wishes, but having made no definite promise to that effect.

No further evidence of any kind relating to the finding of the diamonds in the can had been found, and as things stood, the case seemed pretty black against Louis Martino. Mr. Francis Layton could only hold out moderate hope of success, and tell him that their best chance lay in their counsel, as one never knew beforehand what effect a clever speech would have upon the jury, and as their counsel spoke both Eng-

lish and Dutch, and had had much experience of the South African Courts, he had much faith in him.

Mr. Fairbain had hoped to be present at the trial, but owing to the absence through illness of one of the time-keepers, he could not be spared from the mine. King Snyman also was at his work, and had not even hinted at a wish to be present in Court. He was far too clever for that, and preferred his fellow workmen to think that the trial of Louis Martino did not concern him in the least. Mr. Hillier had to be present, not only on account of the charge against Louis Martino, but because another case, one of manslaughter, against one of the native overseers, had to be heard, he having caused—so it was said in the prosecution—the death of two natives through not properly attending to the mine regulations. Mr. Hillier was not quite certain which case would come on first. He strongly advised Mrs. Hillier not to be present in the Court, for he urged that she was the wife of the General Manager of the mine. It was more prudent that she should not appear to take a personal interest in the case of Louis Martino, as such a proceeding on her part might even prejudice some of the jury against him. Mrs. Hillier however accompanied her husband to Pietsrust, and took Gloria in the car with her.

Mrs. Fairbain was not a demonstrative woman, and rarely displayed affection for anyone except for her son Johannes, but on the morning when Gloria left the house to go to Pietsrust, she suddenly threw her arms round her as she said "Good-bye." She held her close to her expansive bosom, and kissed her heartily and then said:

"Ach, Gloria, all will come right if only we down Oom Petrus. You can give my love to Louis Martino. He isn't guilty; no, he is just mixed up in the barbed wire like we are, and diamonds are no good to no one, no, not under or over the earth. Men lose their lives and their characters to get 'em, and then sluts wear 'em, but don't take on about it, Gloria."

And Gloria kissed her mother back again, not once

but many times, and thanked her, for she knew that her mother was a woman of few words, and this exhibition of feeling on her part had cost her an effort.

It was a silent drive to Pietsrust. No one spoke; there seemed to be too much ahead for time to be used in mere words. Gloria watched the road sometimes as they approached along it. She would notice a rut in a strangely minute manner and count the gates they passed. Her brain was tired, it therefore saw only trivial details, and her mind at present seemed a blank, waiting for new impressions to come of disappointment or horror. She was conscious that her head ached a little, and vaguely wondered if her eyes would ever close naturally again. They seemed to be stretched open now. They had been open all night. Was rest or sleep, sweet sleep, without disturbing dreams, ever to be her portion again?

The car sped on. Mr. Hillier sat in front beside the driver. In the back Mrs. Hillier sat between Gloria and the chief of the Police Post, who was going in to give evidence. Gloria did not even look at her companions; she saw instead the passing landmarks that told her how much nearer she was to Louis and his trial. How well she knew each mile of the way, here was the Sluit where loads of stones had been deposited in order to make a crossing when the rains swelled the stream; there, further on, the little Jew store that had recently been closed, as the owner, who had been suspected of I.D.B., but not having been caught, had merely had his store purchased from him, having first suffered boycott by order of the officials of the mine. A few more miles, and then the square farmhouse of "Vermeulen" was passed, one of the usual homesteads of the middle-class Boer, without any attempt at a flower garden or even a plant in a paraffin tin, and minus any adornment in the way of shrubs or trees. The windows of the house had no lace curtains or any signs of care. The Boer was off saddling a horse when they passed, and shouted out: "Goeje Morgen." He was a tall man with a grizzily red beard, a very dirty coloured shirt, and a

pair of trousers. On his head he wore a greasy felt hat. His wife stood near him, a young woman with an old face. Her hair was plaited in a pigtail down her back. She carried a baby in filthy clothing in her arms.

The car slackened speed as it passed this homestead. Gloria noted all the sordid details as though her mind had grown photographic, and only took from without, being no longer capable of originating thought from within. Then miles of mealie lands without a house in view, only, afar off, a view of kopjes rising through the haze of early morning heat. More mealies, and then again a farm, and a rise in the ground told Gloria that they were half-way to Pietsrust. Half way! She hardly knew if she wished the journey ended or not yet begun. Fear of the future wrapped her in a mantle of nausea. She felt as though a heavy covering was weighing down her heart and numbing her limbs. Her youth rebelled against this injustice. Why should trouble have come so darkly to her and her loved ones? Why? Why? And then her mind having no reply to give, for reason had been lost in despair, she saw that the barbed wire fences of Kleinfontein were just ahead, and a few more miles had gone behind. The car seemed almost like a mocking live thing, carrying her on so quickly to doom.

When they were within sight of the buildings of Pietsrust, and could see the Native Location like a cluster of hives outside the town, Mrs. Hillier slipped her hand under the rug and took Gloria's hand in hers, but she did not say anything.

The car drew up at the New Hotel, and Mrs. Hillier and Gloria got out, but Mr. Hillier and the Police Sergeant drove on to the Court House.

CHAPTER XXXII

"It is no use," said Gloria to Mrs. Hillier as they took off their cloaks in a bedroom Mrs. Hillier had taken, so that they might wash away the dust of the drive. "I simply cannot wait here patiently till the trial is over; it is more than human patience can bear."

"Yet Louis asked you not to go to the Court house," said Mrs. Hillier gently.

"I know, but though it makes him feel better thinking I am not there, still, it will drive me mad to stay outside. Oh! I don't want to be selfish and grumble. I want to do all I can to help him, but waiting is the hardest of all."

"It always is, my dear. Waiting for joy, waiting for grief, waiting for old age, it is the cruellest side of life."

"If only I could go inside. I would do nothing, I would say nothing. I know I could control myself."

"Then, my dear, if you are certain on that point, why not go? I know I am preaching rebellion, but I also know just what you feel like, and I am sorry for you. The great thing is, Louis must not see you, it might unnerve him. A man is just as easily unnerved as a woman, no matter what folks, who don't know human nature, may say to the contrary, and, of course, he might lose his case if he loses his head. Then isn't that absurd? This is not a charge of murder. Oh, Gloria, what a fool I am. I must talk nonsense even on the edge of a precipice. But why not go, and not let Louis see you?"

"But how?"

"Well, the breadth of a Boer woman's back has hidden many a man, so why not a slip of a girl like you? Put on my motor bonnet; no one would know you in that with your hair drawn back and a motor

veil and sit at the back of the Court and look out for the fattest woman you can find to sit behind, a woman with short legs and a big body, one of the spreading four-women-to-the-piece size."

"Oh but yes, if you think I could," said Gloria eagerly.

"Don't blame me if you get into trouble over it, my child. Only it is a suggestion. Do as you like. If you really think seriously of it, hurry, for the Court opens at nine o'clock, and it wants but a few minutes to the hour. I don't know if Martino's case comes off first or not. You are going? Then slip on my coat; you never wear brown; and now for the bonnet, and you must not mind if you look a fright, but this curly hair must be hidden."

"I don't care how I look."

"Then, my dear, you must have ceased to be feminine. Yes, that will do. You can put on these glasses also. I use them for reading. I would slay anyone who said it was a sign of increasing years. Now no one would know you. Have you any money, for I advise you to take one of those mouldy cabs I saw outside?"

"Yes, I have change, thank you," said Gloria. "And you don't think Louis will know me?"

"Not if you keep in the background; even the eyes of a lover could not discover you, and such eyes are usually uncannily sharp, though a lying old song says 'Love is blind.' Now I will go down with you to the street, but no further or I shall give you away; someone might guess."

So Gloria a few seconds later found herself driving over the cobble stones of the High Street in a cab that smelt of a grave and a stable, and soon was at the entrance to the Court house, where she found so many fat women going in. She had no difficulty in slipping through the door unobserved, and noticing a shadowy corner, she took a seat on the last bench in the hall, which already was nearly filled.

Gloria, peeping from behind the broad back of the Boer woman in front of her, could distinguish Mr.

Francis Layton, and by his side Advocate Vanzyl, K.C., who had been retained for Louis Martino. They were seated at the long table with other members of the legal profession. Gloria looked at the strong clean-shaven face of Advocate Vanzyl, and a prayer rose in her heart that he would be their saviour, for she too knew that much would depend upon the way in which he pleaded for the accused. She wondered what could be written on all the papers that lay upon the long table, and was specially interested in the "brief" in front of Advocate Vanzyl, which he at present was gravely studying.

At one end of the long table Capt. Lowly, the head of the local police, was seated with his sergeant, and next to him the young barrister who was to act as Public Prosecutor, and then came the Magistrate. The Sheriff also stood in his place, and was talking to the Registrar. The men were in black, but wore no wigs as they do in England.

The Court was now full, and to Gloria sitting in the dim light it seemed that she must be going through a dream, and all the people present were but shadows in her dream.

Suddenly the Sheriff called out in a loud voice:
"Silence in Court."

The people rose to receive the Judge, who entered through a door at the back of the hall. He also wore no wig, but looked very impressive clad in a robe of red with a broad black ribbon round his neck.

The people remained standing until the Judge had mounted the four steps to the platform. He bowed slightly in turning his head as though including all present, and then everyone sat down, and there was absolute silence while the Judge looked at the "roll," a list of the cases to be tried before him.

The Judge then ordered the prisoners to be brought in, and Gloria felt as though her heart must burst. It seemed to have become too big for her body. She felt that the people near her must hear it's wild beating. But she glanced around, only to find they were all absorbed in the drama before them, and paid no

attention to the soberly-clad woman in brown who wore a close-fitting motor bonnet and spectacles, and very glad indeed was Gloria of her disguise, for as Martino came in, followed by another white man, she realised what it must mean to him, the awful suspense and the sea of faces around, all eagerly staring at him as though he must be unlike an ordinary man. Yes, now Gloria understood that to him it must be a relief to imagine that she was not amongst the crowd. Her heart went out to him, and yet she drew back even further into the shadows.

The two accused stood behind the long table. The Registrar arose and read out the charge against them :

" Martino, you are accused in that you on or about the 4th day of December, at the Vuurklip mine, were found in wrongful and illegal possession of two rough and uncut diamonds, thereby contravening section 9 of Ordinance 78" And so on until the charge ended with the question : " Do you plead guilty or not guilty ? "

Martino replied in a low yet clear voice :

" Not guilty. "

The Registrar then turned to the man accused of manslaughter and read the charge against him, to which he also replied :

" Not guilty. "

The two men were then taken out again, and five natives and a Kaffir woman were brought in. After the Registrar had read the charges, the interpreter translated the same to the natives; in each case the natives replied " Not guilty, " except in that of house-breaking and theft, to which the accused admitted he was guilty, and it having been proved that there had already been sixteen previous convictions against him, he was sentenced to five years' hard labour. This case did not take long, but to Gloria it seemed endless and such unnecessary delay, and she breathed a sigh of relief when all the natives were led out again.

Yet the sigh of relief quickly turned to the heart-burning of suspense, for Martino was the next case called.

Without glancing at the people in the well of the Court, he entered the box behind the Attorney's table. Advocate Vanzyl got up and said:

"I appear for the accused," and then resumed his seat.

The Judge then ordered the Sheriff to call up the Jury. The Sheriff, a local auctioneer, then took one of the cigar-boxes before mentioned that stood on the table. He opened it, and taking out a piece of paper proceeded to read the names of the jurymen.

"Johannes Jacobus Steenberg."

A man seated in the middle of the space allotted to the general public got up and called out "Here" in reply, and walked down the centre of the Court-room to the jury box, and entering took a seat. The Sheriff then put the slip of paper he was holding (and on which had been previously written the name of the man who had just responded to the call) into an empty cigar box, and taking another slip from the same box as before called:

"Karel Johannes de Bruyn."

"Ja," replied the voice of an old grey-haired Boer, and he also stepped forward and entered the jurors' box.

"William Charles Medlington," continued the Sheriff.

"Here," cried the voice of a young Englishman, a farmer in the district.

How eagerly Gloria looked at the faces of the men who responded to their names. To her it seemed awesome that so much responsibility should rest on men who were either quite strangers or mere acquaintances of the accused. How terrible to serve on a jury! And she felt an instant's gladness that her sex saved her from that responsibility, and then again wondered why women should not be called, for they so often knew the truth by instinct when men failed to find it even from evidence. Then her thoughts came back to the Sheriff again as his voice called:

"Petrus Augustus van den Laager."

"Here." And a very tall Boer, looking like a hairy giant, walked up to the jurors' enclosure.

"Jacobus Gerhardus Botha."

"Ja." And a man who seemed to be all beard and shaggy eyebrows took his seat.

Gloria wondered why Boers favoured the fashion of letting their faces be hidden by hairy growths until very little of the swarthy skin could be seen.

"William John Vlakkenberg."

There was no reply. The Sheriff again shouted:

"William John Vlakkenberg," and a policeman went to the entrance door and repeated the name outside.

Then a young man entered with a self-conscious jaunty air. He seemed to have got himself up as a special swell for the occasion, and evidently thought more about himself than the poor prisoner in the dock. He wore a moustache with carefully waxed ends instead of a beard and whiskers like his brother Boers, and sported a red tie. His hair was curly, and had apparently been oiled. In his hand he carried a large new grey felt hat.

"Hendrik Johannes Paulus Stefanus Boeschoten Junior."

A very small man arose on hearing this long name and walked to the jurors' box without saying any word in response.

"Frederick Vale."

"Yes." And a man, certainly English, and looking like one who had seen military service, walked briskly forward from the left side of the hall where he had been standing, leaning up against the wall.

"Alexis Isandhlawana Erasmus."

"Ja, ik is hier." And a stooping, quaint-looking, old, withered Boer came up the hall with a limp.

The Sheriff then closed up his cigar boxes, for nine men had come up when called upon, and nine is the number required by Roman Dutch law as administered in South Africa.

A man seated amongst the legal men at the long table now stood up. It was Advocate Vanzyl. The

chattering in the hall that had broken forth amongst the public at the ending of the calling of the jury died down when they saw this man rise, for everyone wondered what he had to say. It seemed that he objected to one of the jurymen, for in a decisive tone he said:

"My lord, I object to Mr. Botha."

The Judge turned to the juror's box, and said:

"Mr. Botha, you can go."

But Mr. Botha did not move. Apparently he did not understand that he was being spoken to, so the Sheriff cried:

"Botha, jy kan gaan," whereupon the interpreter jumped up and said:

"Botha, die judge zeg, jy kan maan loop!" (the judge says you can get away).

Botha then got up and walked out of the box. Half-way down the hall he suddenly discovered that he had left his hat behind, and he returned to the jurors' box to get it, and the people looking upon this as a huge joke, roared with laughter.

Gloria felt her face flush with anger; how dare the people laugh and joke, she wondered, when the good name of a man was waiting to be tried.

The Sheriff again opened his cigar box, and taking out another slip of paper called:

"Lodewyk Paulus Coetsee."

This man being present took the seat vacated by Botha, and now Gloria hoped there would be no more interruptions, but that the case would go quickly forward. She, however, was doomed to disappointment, for a Mr. Vlakkenberg, the heavy swell with the red tie, who had entered the jurors' box with so conscious an air, now stood up, and pointing to Martino and addressing the interpreter said:

'Zeg voor die judge, ons is famili; die stief-zuster van myn overleden broer's weduwe is een nichtje van den zwager van de moeder van beschuldigde!" (Tell the judge we are related, the step-sister of my late brother's widow is a niece of the brother-in-law of the mother of the accused.) The interpreter

struggled very hard to tell the judge what Mr. Vlakkenberg had said :

“ The step-sister of his widow ? ” asked the Judge.

“ Nee, van myn overleden broer's weduwe ! ” said Vlakkenberg. And the interpreter tried again. “ The step-sister of the widow of his brother who is dead is the sister-in-law of the niece—— ”

“ Nee, ach, nee, man ! ”

“ Oh, yes, ” said the poor interpreter, “ she is a niece of the sister-in-law—oh, no—of the brother-in-law ”

And amidst roars of laughter Advocate Vanzyl got up and said :

“ My lord, the juror said, and the interpreter has been trying to explain, that this juror is distantly related to my client. ”

The Judge thereupon ordered Mr. Vlakkenberg to leave the jurors' box, and the Sheriff again had recourse to his cigar box and called out :

“ Marten Frederick Maguire. ”

“ Here, ” was the response, and going to the jurors' box this man completed the complement of jurymen required.

Then the Registrar read out the charge against Louis Martino again, and the interpreter struggled valiantly in his endeavour to translate it into Dutch for the benefit of the jurymen.

Then the young barrister who was acting as Public Prosecutor got up, and standing with one hand resting upon a pile of voluminous documents, addressed the jury as follows :

“ My lord, and gentlemen of the jury,—The first case you are called upon to decide to-day is a very simple case indeed. The accused is a miner who was in the employ of the Luilekkerland Company's diamond mine, commonly known as the Vuurklip. His occupation was such that he might occasionally pick up diamonds. I will produce a witness who will tell you of the regulations of the mine, that all diamonds picked up in the workings are to be handed

up immediately to the person in charge of the workings or to the mine office. I will bring further evidence to show you that accused has been found in actual possession of diamonds, which under the regulations he ought to have handed up. From the evidence which will be led you will see in what a cunning way accused tried to get the diamonds out of the mine, but through the conscientious care of one of the employees this plan was frustrated. I will further lead evidence to show that the stones found in possession of the accused are actually rough and uncut diamonds, which under the law of the country it is prohibited to possess, without adequate permit.

"You will find that my string of evidence is very complete and very simple. There was no trapping, and in consequence my learned friend, who no doubt will ably defend accused, cannot tell you that accused had been tempted or bribed by unscrupulous officials. I present to you a clear case, a case which I am convinced will leave in your minds no shadow of doubt as to the guilt of accused, and I feel confident you will come to an unanimous verdict in this singularly clear and crushing case."

The young barrister did not give this speech straight off the reel, but spoke a few words at a time, which the interpreter then tried to render into Dutch, but at times his translation was so vague or so bad that murmurs arose in the hall amongst the public; and several times the policeman standing at the entrance door had to call out:

"Order in the Court."

One of the jurymen, named de Bruyn, twice interrupted and corrected the interpreter. Thereupon the Public Prosecutor suggested that the case should go on in English, to which Mr. de Bruyn however objected. Although the Prosecutor made his suggestion in the English language, Mr. de Bruyn, without waiting for it to be put into Dutch, cried out:

"Nee, ik verstaa nie Engelsch nie!" and thereupon the proceedings continued as they had commenced.

To Gloria the dream had turned to a horrible nightmare. She followed with impatience the speech of the Prosecutor with its many interruptions, knowing as she did both English and Dutch. She felt her blood boiling with anger at the unnecessary interference of Mr. de Bruyn, and also felt a great resentment against the Court for having such an incompetent fool as interpreter. It seemed to her that everything was conspiring to place Louis in the wrong, and she dreaded more as the moments fled what the final verdict would be.

The young barrister adjusted his bands and consulted his papers, and then continued:

"As first witness for the prosecution, I will call Jacobus van Vuuren."

From near the back of the hall there now rose and stepped forward a tall young Dutchman. He entered the witness box, and the Registrar swore him in "To say the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God," but no Bible was handed him to kiss as would have been the case in England. He simply held up his right arm. The examination began.

"You are a guard in the employ of the Vuurklip mine?"

"Yes."

"You remember Tuesday the 4th December, 1913?"

"Yes."

"It is, amongst other things, your business to search the coffee cans coming out of the mine?"

"Yes."

"You found this can amongst the other cans that had come from the mine?" And the Prosecutor held up Martino's can as he spoke.

"Yes."

"What next?"

"I then proceed to carry out my duties, and by so doing opened this can, at eleven thirty-seven, and I found two diamonds inside."

The interpreter was hard at it: ". . . . en in die kan het hy twee diamonds gekree."

Advocate Vanzyl got up and objected to the interpretation and sat down again.

The young Prosecutor was rather astonished, and seemed for a moment to wonder why his learned friend the K.C. had done so; then a look of enlightenment seemed to come into his face, as though it dawned upon him that Advocate Vanzyl intended to make the most he could out of the defective translation, and he continued:

"Yes, you found the diamonds inside?"

"Yes. Then I put the lid back on the can and called the head guard and showed him what I had found. The head guard thereupon examined the can and the lid carefully, but did not touch the diamonds. He then put the lid back on to the can, and placed same outside on the shelf and went away to the police."

The guard paused, and the Prosecutor having been busy talking to the Captain of the Police and not listening to a word of the guard's last sentence, now looked up at the cessation of the guard's voice, and "Yes?" he asked mechanically.

But Van Vuuren remained silent, so the Prosecutor said again:

"Yes? and then?"

Still Van Vuuren did not reply, but fidgeted and looked round the Court in an embarrassed manner.

Advocate Vanzyl then rose, and looking steadily at the witness said, in clear level tones:

"You have said all they told you to say?"

"Yes, sir!" replied Van Vuuren, and the Court was convulsed with laughter.

"I must really object to my learned friend's remark, interrupting me," observed the Prosecutor.

"Anyhow, he said 'Yes,'" retorted Advocate Vanzyl in his quiet rather sarcastic manner, laying special emphasis on the "yes."

The Prosecutor turned to Captain Lowly, the Chief of the Police, and after speaking to him quietly for a minute sat down.

Advocate Vanzyl hereupon rose again from his

seat, and a hushed silence spread over the Court, the silence that holds awe and expectancy, for Advocate Vanzyl had a great reputation, and the public waited now in much the same mood as an audience waits when the band stops and an acrobat performs his most daring feats. Louis Martino also seemed to awaken from his open-eyed dream. He seemed to gather his scattered senses together, and focussed his mind upon the man to whom he looked for delivery from an adverse judgment. He had felt so despondent up to now, but the "Yes, sir," of the last witness raised hope within him. He began to feel that the public were against the witness, and therefore must be with him, and the pulse of the jury would beat in unison with the pulse of the public. As for Gloria, she felt so mentally bruised by the levity of the proceedings that it seemed to her that all she longed for was the end, be it what it may.

"Now, Mr. Van Vuuren," said Advocate Vanzyl; "you just now answered my question with 'Yes.' I want to ask you if you made no mistake. What I want you to tell me, in fact, is that you have omitted no material facts."

Van Vuuren looked at Advocate Vanzyl, then at the Prosecutor, and did not reply. He, in fact, clearly showed by the blank expression on his face that he did not know what to say. The Judge then turned round in his chair, and looked at Van Vuuren over the top of his spectacles, which rested far down on his large red nose.

Advocate Vanzyl then said:

"I will put the question in a different way. Have you told us all?"

"Yes, sir," came the prompt reply, and again there was laughter in Court, and Advocate Vanzyl observed when the laughter had died away:

"No, I do not know what you mean. I want to know if you have told us everything which it is important to know?"

After a long pause Van Vuuren answered:

"I do not know."

"I—do—not—know!" repeated Advocate Vanzyl, slowly laying emphasis on each word, and the Judge wrote down a note in the book before him.

"Did accused put the diamonds under that lid?"

"I do not know."

"Could the can have been tampered with after it left the accused?"

"I do not know."

"Did the piccanin who carries the cans perhaps put the diamonds in?"

"I do not know."

"How late did the piccanin bring the cans to the gate?"

"I do not know."

"And yet you are certain it was eleven thirty-seven when you found the can. Think of it, was it about eleven thirty?"

"Yes, you are right."

"Did someone perhaps put the diamonds in after the can arrived?"

"I do not know."

"Did you see all the cans all the time from the time they arrived until you began searching them?"

"I do not know."

"Surely you were told to say 'Yes' if I asked you that question?"

"No, they did not think of that."

Again a roar of laughter, which, however, was quickly suppressed, and Advocate Vanzyl, placing one hand on his hip, looked fixedly at Van Vuuren as he asked:

"I understand that white men are not searched at the mine, are they?"

"No."

"Then why should the accused put the diamonds into the can when he might more easily and with less fear of detection have put them into his trouser pocket?"

"I do not know."

Advocate Vanzyl, with a smile on his face, then

sat down, and the Public Prosecūtor and Captain Lowly looked uncomfortable.

The Judge then turned to the jury, and asked:

“Do you wish to ask any questions?”

One of the jurors got up and said:

“Hoe kem weet hy nu nix nie?” The interpreter, who was beginning to get tired, repeated:

“How is it you know nothing now?”

“I know everything,” was Van Vuuren’s reply, which the interpreter translated as:

“Ik het nix vergiet nie!” (I have forgotten nothing).

The juryman seemed to be satisfied, and sat down.

Van Vuuren was then told to leave the witness box, and he walked down the hall hearing suppressed giggles on either side.

The Public Prosecutor then rose, and James Witten was called.

A smart young man who had been sitting in the front benches then rose, and with the air of knowing his business, walked into the witness box, where he held himself erect and stood unabashed as he said:

“I am a member of the Luilekkerland Police, and on the 4th of December last I was given a warrant for the arrest of accused. He came out of the mine at ten minutes past twelve, and at twelve fifteen I arrested and cautioned him.”

“Yes?” asked the Prosecutor, as though desiring him to continue, but as the member of the police force did not respond, the Prosecutor picked up Martino’s can, and holding it up, asked:

“Is this the can you found in the possession of the accused?”

“Yes!” replied the police detective, and the Prosecutor sat down.

All eyes were now turned to Advocate Vanzyl, who swiftly got up and asked:

“What did Martino say when you arrested him?”

“He said I was wrong.”

“And what did he say after you opened his can?”

"He said, 'I know nothing about that, there is a mistake somewhere.'"

Again Advocate Vanzyl sat down.

One of the jurymen then got up and asked:

"Denk jy dat die kerel guilty is?"

The interpreter translated: "Do you think that man is guilty?"

Before the witness could reply the Judge interrupted and said that that was exactly what the jury had to decide, but not the witnesses.

The jurymen, however, persisted, bursting forth into a mixture of English and Taal: "In what way kan ons justice doen, as ons nie kan questions ask nie?"

The Judge then again explained to him for what purpose the jurymen were present. The man, however, shook his head, but sat down. Then the Prosecutor got up and said:

"Gentlemen of the Jury,—I will now call evidence to show that the stones found are rough and uncut diamonds. I just mention that these diamonds are in the lid exactly as they were found on accused, and have not been extracted from the grease to which they adhere. I will call upon Mr. Hillier, the general manager of the Vuurklip mine, as witness to prove that they are as I state, rough and uncut diamonds."

Mr. Hillier came forward, and Gloria felt her heart beat wildly, although she knew that probably the cross-examination would now perhaps only be purely technical, still she knew how much Mr. Hillier had the welfare of her and her fiancé at heart. He would do all he could, of that she felt convinced.

After replying to the preliminary questions, the can was handed to Mr. Hillier, and he was told to take the lid off. Having done so, he saw embedded in some grease two diamonds. He was then told to take the diamonds out of the grease, and this he proceeded to do. The first stone he extracted was an octahedron, silver-white, a good stone. He rubbed off the grease, examined it carefully, rolling it between his fingers, and placed it on one side. He then took the second

stone out, and great was his astonishment as he recognised the well-known test stone, his favourite one, that had been lost. He could hardly trust his eyes; he looked and looked again. There was no mistake, *it was the test-stone!*

It then flashed through his mind that Gloria might after all be right in her suspicion of King Snyman, the machine man, but he dared not say so at that moment; he must think, he must gain time; to condemn King Snyman at that moment would be to lose him.

The silence in Court now became oppressive.

"Are they rough stones?" called out a jurymen, unable to restrain his excitement.

Mr. Hillier looked towards the Judge.

"Please state if they are rough stones," he said.

"They certainly are," Mr. Hillier said, and "Ah!" went a sound like an audible sigh across the room.

With a sudden wave of thought, as though instinct guided him, Mr. Hillier tried for the moment to put out of his mind the surprise the test-stone had given him, and putting down the diamond by the side of the other, he picked up the lid and can and closely examined the same. All eyes were fixed on Mr. Hillier, who at that moment seemed much more interested in the lid and the can than in the diamonds. He tried to put the lid on the can very slowly, then took it off, put it on again, turned it round, and then took it off again. There was no doubt about it, the lid did not belong to the can. He was convinced that it was not Martino who had stolen the diamonds. Who then had?

Putting down the can and the lid, he again examined the test-stone.

The Public Prosecutor could not understand the puzzled look on Mr. Hillier's face or why he should be so interested in the can, and everyone in Court was just as perplexed as the Prosecutor, and wondered what could be passing in the General Manager's mind.

"Mr. Hillier, will you please state what the stones

are you have taken out of the lid?" asked the Prosecutor.

Mr. Hillier, however, instead of replying, looked again at the lid, and then asked:

"May I have a piece of paper?"

There was a stir of excitement amongst the people, and heads were bent forward, and a low rumble of voices murmured as Mr. Hillier took from his pocket a pencil, and accepting the sheet of paper handed to him, calmly wrote a few words down on it. After he had finished writing, he folded the paper up, and handing it to the Sheriff asked aloud if he would please hand it to the Judge.

What could it mean? The anxiety of Gloria and Martino can well be imagined. Did it mean a ray of hope or utter condemnation? But neither was for the present to know.

The Judge seemed surprised at Mr. Hillier's note. He, however, took the paper, and adjusting his spectacles read it again and again, but not aloud:

"Martino is the wrong man. I have here proofs; I can lay my hands on the right man if it is done carefully."

The Judge looked at Hillier over his spectacles, which he had a quick way of shifting on to the tip almost of his nose; he seemed at a loss to know what to do; again he read the words on the paper, and then asked:

"May I pass this note to the Public prosecutor?"

"Yes please, my lord," Mr. Hillier replied.

After the Public Prosecutor had read the message, he too seemed dumbfounded; he looked up at the Judge, then at Mr. Hillier, and finally his eyes fell again on the Judge.

"My lord——!" he began, but he could say no more.

The Judge then fully realising the awkward difficulty that had arisen, addressed the Prosecutor.

"I would suggest you ask me for an adjournment for a quarter of an hour."

"Yes, my lord." And the adjournment was granted.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GLORIA slipped out from the back of the Court unheeded, but when she reached the street she saw Petrus Dutoit standing on the pavement. She was close to him before she perceived who it was, and something familiar about her must have attracted him, for he started, and bent forward to look into her face the more closely, but she, as soon as she realised that her uncle was staring at her, darted away, and mixing with a crowd of Boers, was soon able to turn quickly up a side street and thus evade him. As to whether she had been recognised or not, she was uncertain, but she thought not.

At that time of suspense she had no wish to encounter her uncle, for she knew that from him she was not likely to hear ought but sneers, and so great was her anxiety for her lover that her hatred for Oom Petrus was insignificant in comparison.

What could have happened to cause the request for an adjournment? Surely it must be something in Louis's favour. At least it seemed a straw of hope to cling to.

Would it be possible to seek out Mr. Francis Layton and ask him if he knew what was going on?

Ah, it was silly, childish to hide in a side street from Oom Petrus, while so much might be known perhaps just outside the Court. What did her hatred of Petrus Dutoit matter by the side of the great crisis in the lives of both her lover and herself? Gloria was by now in that state of overwrought nerves when one does not know which way to turn or what to do, and blames oneself for doing this or that instead of something else. She hurriedly returned to the Court house and mingled with the crowd outside. She felt herself trembling in every limb, while her mouth and throat

were parched and her head ached as though encased in an iron band. Fortunately no one heeded her, for they were one and all concerned in talking over rumours, and had no time to bestow in curiosity on the soberly-clad spectacled young woman whose hair was drawn away out of sight and who certainly looked neither interesting nor amusing.

Gloria listened to all the fragments of conversations she could, anxiety excusing her from being an eaves-dropper, yet she had heard little except that the General Manager of the Vuurklip mine was closeted with the Public Prosecutor, and no one knew why.

The "Sporting Editor" of the "Herald" was prepared to bet that further arrests of two prominent Pietsrust merchants would take place, whereas the jovial billiard marker of the "New Hotel" became very popular when he gave, in a loud voice, his opinion that Martino would be acquitted and leave the Court without a stain on his character, because Hillier would find that it was not Martino's can at all in which the diamonds had been detected.

And then, fifteen minutes having passed away, the excited crowd eagerly hurried back into the Court, for the news was passed round that the Judge was about to return.

Gloria, feeling that the suspense must kill her if it lasted much longer, surged in with the rest, and this time was carried by the rush further forward. Yet still she had the presence of mind to draw to one side and sit so as not to be seen by the accused, for if he should be proved guilty he should not suffer by seeing her sitting there to listen to his downfall, for it would avail nothing if Gloria made a stir in Court and proclaimed her belief in his innocence. She was sensible enough to know that any man would hate a scene that savoured of melodrama. There was sufficient tragedy in the whole matter without that. No, should he be found guilty, she would wait and seek an interview in private and comfort him then.

But would he be found guilty?

Mentally she said "Hush!" to her thoughts, and

tried to still the beating of her heart, and strained her ears to listen, for the Public Prosecutor was standing up. What was he saying?

There was a profound silence in Court, and, addressing the Judge, the Public Prosecutor said:

"My lord, certain information has come to my knowledge, and therefore I do not wish to proceed with the case. I herewith withdraw the charge!"

Thereupon the Judge remarked:

"Martino, you have heard what the Public Prosecutor has said. You can go! Gentlemen of the jury, you are discharged!"

Louis Martino bowed his head. His voice seemed to say, "Thank you, my lord," but no one could be certain of this, for such a clattering arose among the people, who now seemed to be as eager to get outside the hall as they had been to enter.

Gloria rose also and made her way to the door. She did not analyse her thoughts; she only knew that tears were now raining from her eyes, and when she put up her hand to her face they encountered the glasses Mrs. Hillier had lent her. She took them off, and mechanically put them into the little bag she carried. She fumbled to find her handkerchief, she seemed dazed, then suddenly she realised that Louis was free, really free! She might perhaps meet him outside the Court, and womanlike, she thought of her hair, and heedless of those around she drew forward a little of her waving hair and brought it over her forehead, so that it glowed under the rim of her bonnet. She had no looking-glass, she wanted none, and her tears fell all the time. She reached the street, a woman near stared at her and said, "Why, if that isn't Gloria Fairbain."

But Gloria took no notice, for she saw her sweetheart, her very own Louis, standing on the pavement talking to Mr. Francis Layton. He turned quickly, for he had heard the woman's remark.

"Gloria!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it's—it's me," she said, and she seemed to

stumble, but Louis caught her and held her so closely to him.

The people gathered round.

"Stand back," he cried. "Don't you see the girl is fainting?"

"I'm all right, Louis. I'm really all right, only let's get away from all these dreadful eyes," Gloria whispered hysterically.

"Miss Fairbain, will you not take this cab?"

The calm voice of Mr. Francis Layton was speaking, and his cool firm hands had taken one of Gloria's hands in his.

"Yes, please," she said, and so she suffered her lover and Mr. Layton to lead her to one of the evil-smelling Victoria's standing waiting, but to her it seemed as a throne of safety, an ambrosial refuge of peace; and even before the horses had responded to the call of the driver and shaken their limbs into action, a smile had come to Gloria's face, for the arm of her lover was round her.

Francis Layton stood hat in hand, until the carriage had driven away, and then he sighed as he recovered his head.

"Love is very wonderful," he said to himself. "It is the flower of life."

CHAPTER XXXIV

WE hate those who illuse us, yes, but not with half so bitter a hatred as we feel for those whom we have illused! Petrus Dutoit was by no means pleased at the turn events had taken with regard to Louis Martino. He had no personal grudge against him, but he, Petrus Dutoit, had acted so badly himself towards the Fairbains, that he did not wish any happiness to enter into their lives. He preferred to glory in the contrast of his more flourishing condition, and begrudged Gloria any change of life that might bring her contentment. She had always treated her uncle with suspicion and ill-concealed contempt, and therefore he would have rejoiced if her lover had been condemned as guilty. And his chagrin increased when he heard that Mr. Hillier had persuaded him to go back to the Vuurklip mine, so that his character might be quite re-established in the eyes of his mates, and prove to the world that his employers had every confidence in him.

To say that King Snyman was also annoyed is but vaguely to express his feelings on the matter, and when he and Petrus Dutoit met and talked things over, King Snyman urged Dutoit to try still further to get what he could from the Fairbain family, even if it meant that they should be reduced to utter beggary. For with a man of King Snyman's nature hatred is a twin to passion, that which he could not possess he longed to spoil. And he wished that even the little that remained from the sale of the farm could be taken from them, so that Gloria might have to work to help keep her people, or even if she wedded Louis Martino, bring him nothing as a dowry and experience the bitterness of having to live on her husband's wages, knowing that her people were in want,

and she unable to help them. King Snyman had a mind for detail and much time to brood in, and thanks to the lurid impossibilities of bioscope stories, his imagination worked and he even pictured himself some day rich and able to buy Gloria from a sordid existence, for he felt convinced that she, with, what he was pleased to term, "her fancy pride," would never be able to endure for long any actual privation, or would put up with the ugliness of real poverty.

Petrus Dutoit was nothing loath to discuss with him his hatred of Gloria, and one day, after being treated to an, even for him, unusual number of drinks he said he would help Snyman to get Gloria away from Louis Martino if he would assist him in the matter of the discovery rights. King Snyman replied that he was even prepared to swear, if necessary, that Dutoit had long ago deposited a sample of yellow ground with him, so as to prove the finding. And so, when the next day Dutoit had recovered from his "cups," the two men together concocted a letter of demand to send to the Luilekkerland Co., as this Company did not seem to be in any hurry to reply to Petrus Dutoit's former appeal.

Petrus Dutoit, therefore, with the help of King Snyman, wrote a letter stating that if he was not paid the amount he claimed, viz., £50,000, within a week, he would take legal action against the Luilekkerland Co. without further notice.

Mr. Vancohn was then requested by the Board of the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. to proceed at once to Pietsrust and offer a compromise to Petrus Dutoit.

To arrange the acceptance of a compromise however was not an easy matter. Petrus Dutoit was covetous and greedy, and he further knew that so far as the Luilekkerland Co. was concerned, this was probably his last chance of bleeding them, and it was not until Mr. Vancohn pointed out that if he did not accept a compromise then he would certainly have to take legal action to get anything at all, and the legality of his right to claim this payment would

certainly come into question, and Mr. Vancohn further explained that once the matter should be publicly thrashed out, Petrus Dutoit might find himself in the unenviable position of not only losing his case, but being committed for perjury, should he swear to false statements in Court.

After much haggling, therefore, and some persuasion of a liquid nature ordered by the cute lawyer, Petrus Dutoit consented to accepting thirty-five thousand pounds instead of the fifty thousand he had asked for, and Mr. Vancohn drew up the following document :

“ Pietsrust, , 1914.

“ Whereas Mr. Petrus Dutoit prospected the farm Clevedon and discovered thereon a diamond mine prior to this farm being sold to the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. Ltd. this Company now agrees to pay Mr. Petrus Dutoit the sum of £35,000 in lieu of an undivided one-fifth interest in the mine discovered and against full settlement of all claims against the Company.”

Petrus Dutoit signed two copies of this document, one for the Luilekkerland Diamond Co. and one for himself, and although his signature was by now somewhat hieroglyphical in nature, suggesting the wandering of a drunken spider over a piece of inked paper, still it was sufficiently legible, and the paper once signed, he asked for more drink, which Mr. Vancohn ordered for him, although convinced in his own mind that he had had as much as was good for him, and feeling an intense disgust for an appetite he neither understood nor shared. For the financial thief is usually a sober man, and no matter what his own vices may be, he has a supreme contempt for the weakness or the vices of others, especially if they mean expenditure without profit and an additional means of rendering one an easy prey into the bargain.

It was at this juncture that Mr. Vancohn said to Petrus Dutoit :

“ Now you quite understand that though you have

signed these documents, and I, as representative of the Company, am about to sign the same, I cannot do so until you have handed over to me the letter I once gave you. You probably have the letter on you at the present moment; please hand it over."

"Ach, nee man, I want more money for that, much more money."

"Doubtless you do, but understand once and for all that you will not get it. You give me the letter now, or this document gets torn up, and devil a bit do you get for your discovery rights."

"But I can claim them, I can."

"Stow that twaddle, man, and keep to facts. You know you prospected without permission. I know that also. Give me back my letter and I keep silent on that point."

"But will you always keep silent?" asked the Boer, with a brain wave of insight into the future and a knowledge of the character of the man before him.

"Of course," answered Mr. Vancohn, forcing himself to look sincere, although he was smiling within his thoughts at the prospect of a new source of profitable blackmail for himself in the days to come.

"Still I don't like giving up this bit of paper," said Petrus Dutoit, shoving his hands into his trouser pockets and sticking out his legs before him, as though the contemplation of his black and white check trousers and new brown boots gave him pleasure.

"Man, surely we are friends by now? Have another drink? Come, I am not stingy, as you know. What shall it be? You are a powerful man; no ladylike drinks for you, eh? What about a bottle of brandy?" asked Vancohn.

"But you don't drink."

"No, more's the pity, I can't. My health, you know. You are a giant compared to me. Brandy, eh?" And his long thin finger was on the press button of the electric bell as he spoke.

"Ja, brandy is good enough for me."

"Yes, I wish I could join you. It is a sad state

of affairs, my friend, when you have the inclinations of a man and the strength of a feeble woman."

"Ja, you miss much, but you get much. You feather your nest alright; trust a Jo'burg lawyer for that. That's where we Boers fail, we haven't the education."

"And may I suggest that in most instances you are well qualified to study your own interests without," said Vancohn suavely, and the man before him hardly knew if he was being paid a compliment or not, so interested seemed the fragile lawyer at that moment in studying the symmetry of his slender fingers.

A black waiter arrived with the brandy. He was clad in white and carried a dirty tray on which two smeared glasses, a bedroom caraffe of water, and an opened bottle of Martell's Three Star brandy, stood. Petrus Dutoit was of the class of man who could drink brandy from a broken cup, or wine from a jug. He did not notice that the glasses were dirty; he only saw the bottle of brandy.

He drank, and finally returned to Mr. Vancohn the letter he had once given him.

This letter and the now signed document Mr. Vancohn placed within his specially constructed cigarette case, the same case in fact that Claas had seen him use at the machine. Once the papers were in Mr. Vancohn's possession, he displayed no desire to linger in the companionship of Petrus Dutoit, who by now was reaching not only a maudlin but a disgusting state, as the bottle of brandy before him was emptied and his body became more filled.

Mr. Vancohn had an aesthetic love of the beautiful, and he wiped the perspiration of disgust from his palid face when he emerged from that private sitting room, leaving Petrus Dutoit half soaked with alcohol and desirous of continuing the treatment; the partially emptied bottle of brandy before him, his waistcoat unfastened, his beloved felt hat pushed to the back of his head, his loose mouth open, his eyes bleared. He licked his lips occasionally and his large damp ugly

hands caressed the bottle and a glass. He was quite happy in his bestial way, as an overfed animal is happy—until he is sick.

As soon as Mr. Hillier heard by telephone that Mr. Vancohn had arrived in Pietsrust and would require the motor car to be sent in to fetch him, as he would be going out to the mine, Mr. Hillier gave instructions to one of the white detectives to be on the lookout, and, without arousing any suspicion in the mind of King Snyman, to try and secrete himself in the elevator at the machine so that he as well as Claas might watch the movements of both Mr. Vancohn and King Snyman, should they attempt to exchange diamonds for cigarettes as before. This detective was furnished with a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Vancohn, which however still required to have the date filled in, and Mr. Hillier said it was not to be used until Mr. Hillier himself should give the order.

Quite unconscious of the trap prepared for him, Mr. Vancohn arrived at the mine, and after a few words of conversation with Mr. Hillier, said he would take a walk round the mine and then return to the manager's house for lunch, and it would be time enough then to discuss the business of the mine.

"Suit me all the better in fact," Mr. Hillier had replied. "I have some urgent matters to attend to just now with regard to Government boiler returns, and in an hour's time I shall be free. I will 'phone my wife to expect you; she will not let you off with a glass of milk and a sandwich this time."

"Your wife is always kind," replied the suave, fragile lawyer, knowing that Mrs. Hillier merely tolerated him because she had to, but it was part of Vancohn's stock-in-trade to be charmed and charming. It cost nothing, except occasionally his pride, and often made much profit.

Mr. Vancohn did not go at once to the machine, or in a direct route. It seemed better policy to linger at the edge of the mine and appear interested in the development of the ever-extending cavity and watch the natives who, like swarms of black ants, seemed

so busily moving about, engaged with picks and shovels loading the little trolleys. Then in a casual sort of way, as though more for the sake of a stroll than for any other reason, he went to the machine and nodded to King Snyman, who however took no other notice of him than to say "Good day, sir," until the men near were engaged, so as not to observe him or had moved away. And then the offering and accepting of cigarettes began, and by this means four lots of diamonds found their way from King Snyman's waistcoat pocket to the cigarette case of Mr. Vancohn.

Then the white detective contrived to slip away unheard, and going to the police station telephone, he 'phoned through to the manager's house.

Mrs. Hillier answered the 'phone and replied that her husband was at the mine office.

"I know that, but for special reasons I would prefer to speak to him in his own house, so would you kindly ring off now, and then ring him up and ask him to come home for a few minutes and I will come round. Say Jack Smith wants to speak to him; he will understand what that means."

Mrs. Hillier did so, and thus her husband had some conversation with the detective in his wife's little sitting room, which was sacred from the visits of even directors of the Vuurklip mine, and it was arranged that Mr. Vancohn should be arrested after he had come into the house. Mr. Hillier then returned to the mine office, and a few minutes later Mr. Vancohn joined him there and began to chat about the affairs of the mine, and even boasted that he had been able to make Petrus Dutoit come to terms with regard to the discovery rights, observing that his co-directors would be delighted when they heard that he had beat the Boer down from fifty thousand, the sum he had asked, to thirty-five thousand.

Mr. Hillier seemed very interested, as indeed he was, and with a smile said:

"You are a smart lawyer and man of business, there is no denying that. I suppose it is really worth

fifty thousand as a substitute for the legal fifth value of the mine? "

"Worth it? I should say so. I cannot yet say the estimated value of the mine, but the discovery rights are worth more than the sum friend Boer accepted by a long chalk."

"And you have not given him a cheque on account, or anything of that nature, I suppose? "

"Oh, no, not necessary. The paper he has signed is sufficiently binding on both sides and our name good enough for payment. He will get his cheque from the head office as soon as I return. He is a lucky swine."

"You are right, he is, and certainly a swine! Shall we go over now for lunch? My wife rang up and said not to be late, as she knows you like light dishes, so we are to have poached eggs and spinach. We are very proud of the spinach we are growing just now."

"Right, let's be off. I suppose you don't charge the Company with your garden boys, do you? "

"We use the convalescents from the hospital; they can only do light work. Just see to those letters Tanner, please. Now I am ready? "

The two men left the mine office and walked across to the manager's house, discussing en route how it would be possible to reduce the amount of compensation usually paid to natives for the loss of a limb caused by accident during working at the mine, and what was the lowest possible amount the widow of a white man who had lost his life through a rush of ground in the mine, could be induced to take.

"Of course she knows her husband was drunk at the time? " said Mr. Vancohn.

"No, I spared her that detail," replied Mr. Hillier.

"A mistake, for she might think the Company to blame and bring forward negligence on the part of the management," said Mr. Vancohn.

"I will risk that; she will be happy in retaining some respect for her dead husband, poor creature. I

can stand a little unmerited blame better than she can hear him degraded."

"Yes, but we must look at it from a strictly business point of view. There should be no sentiment in business, it doesn't send the shares up. We reserve anything in the way of mere talk or sympathy for our annual meetings if the shareholders don't come out so well as they expected. This woman will want more money if you sympathise with her."

"She is not the sort to make a fuss, poor devil; meek and mild and a semi invalid with two sickly children."

"Good; then we can offer quite a small amount. And now for the promised spinach. But I would like a wash."

They were then entering the door of the house. "I fancy I can hear my wife in the bathroom. Do you mind waiting a minute?" said Hillier, leading the way into the drawing room. He had no wish for Vancohn to go into the bathroom just then, not knowing what trick he might be up to, and fearing that he might even swallow the diamonds he had on him, as some natives are known to do. Yet this was not likely, for Mr. Vancohn had not in the slightest way become suspicious of arrest. Still Hillier was taking no risks.

As soon as they had entered the drawing room, a man who had been comfortably seated in an easy chair arose, and laying his hand on the arm of Vancohn said:

"You are arrested. I caution you, that anything you say may be used as evidence against you!"

Mr. Vancohn was always pale, but at these words his thin face seemed to turn a little green in tint, although his nerves were as steel. He did not lose his sangfroid; he even smiled as he said:

"It is a mistake; please show me the warrant."

The detective handed the warrant, the date of which had been duly filled in, to Mr. Vancohn, who took it in his slender fingers without so much as a tremor,

and calmly read it through. Mr. Hillier stood between him and the door and silently watched him.

"I can only repeat what I have already said, and say it is a mistake. I know nothing about any diamonds."

"Well, I will have to search you," said the detective.

Mr. Vancohn's face seemed to shrink and his lips trembled slightly. Still he offered no objection. He was a man of the law and knew resistance would be useless. He was unarmed and it was a case of two to one, and both of the other men stronger than he, and for aught he knew armed; besides, they were miles from the nearest station, flight was not possible. Experience of life had taught him that one loses nothing by keeping cool, and often gains much.

The detective put his right hand at once into the inner breast pocket and pulled out the cigarette case. He opened this at the small side table, and eight rough uncut diamonds rolled out. Then the detective took out the letter about the discovery rights so recently given to him by Petrus Dutoit, and after he had read it, handed it to Mr. Hillier, and then the other letter that Mr. Vancohn had been so anxious to get back, the letter given by himself to Petrus Dutoit with regard to the buying of the diamond mine. When Vancohn saw this he clenched his teeth for a moment, and then said:

"That is a private letter and concerns myself only, and I may say also the Luilekkerland Company."

"Then you had better have it, sir," said the detective, and handed it to Mr. Hillier.

When Hillier had read both these documents he said to the detective:

"Just leave us for a few minutes please, and wait outside. I will call you in again."

"Yes, sir," said the detective, and left the room. The two men stood, facing each other.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE two men were as unlike each other in appearance as they were in character. One might liken them in the animal world to a viper and a St. Bernard dog. Hillier was a man strong in thought and deed, with the strength of large proportions of mind, and therefore none of the smallness of a lesser man. Vancohn was not his enemy from any personal point of view, except in so far as he was the enemy of all men, a vampire in his utterly callous selfishness; and as he stood there, looking so slender, so fragile, so thin a weed of humanity, Hillier felt such a contempt for his mean nature, he could not at the same time spare any thought of spite for the feebleness of his sickly frame. Pointing to a chair, he said:

"Shall we sit down, Mr. Vancohn? Nothing will be gained by standing, and you look faint."

"Thanks, I am quite all right," and Vancohn dropped into a low chair and passed his thin fingers across his brow.

"I suppose you are wondering why the detective should immediately go for your cigarette case?" said Hillier, sitting down also.

"I never waste time in speculative thought," Vancohn replied. "Naturally, I reserve my defence, and am not going to be drawn now. You must remember, Hillier, my position, and the position of the Company I represent, and who, by the way, employ you. The result of the indignity I have just experienced can on my part be accounted for. I hope, for your own sake, that you will be able to offer a justifiable excuse for your allowing such an action to take place. The idea of placing one of your Directors on a level

with a Kaffir, and having him searched, is scandalous."

"I agree with you, though I venture to think the grounds for suspicion more scandalous still. But we won't bandy words. You, as a lawyer, will be able to argue better than I, no doubt. I want to talk straight, and get at a decision quickly too. I have given the subject some thought already, and weighed up the pros and cons. It would be a big disgrace for the Company if you stood on your trial as a thief, and who would gain by it?"

"Answer your own questions. At present I prefer to listen," said Mr. Vancohn, trying to size up the mind of the man before him. He wondered what he was driving at. Could it be that he wanted to become a brother thief? Or a sharer in possible future plunders? If so, why not have searched him himself privately?

"Yes, who would gain?" continued Hillier. "A few legal men would get fees; you would go to gaol——"

"Pardon me, my friend, my side of the case has not yet been heard."

"I say, you would go to gaol, the shares of the Company would probably go down when the moral quality of which one of the Directors was made became known, and the rank and file of the shareholders would suffer, not the Directors and their backers who sold the shares would suffer, no, but the poor fools who bought them, the unsuspecting public. Then the mine itself, how keep up the authority necessary if those in command are but common felons! The employees morally would suffer. No, I think it could do little good to place you on trial."

"What, then, do you propose?" asked Vancohn, expecting to be at least blackmailed for a large amount.

"In the first place, you must see that the *full value* of the discovery rights get paid to the proper people, viz., the Fairbain family. I may say that I happen to know they can prove their claim."

"Claims always can be proved, out of court," said the lawyer sarcastically, and added: "But what about the letter I have given to Dutoit on behalf of my Company, and his letter to us which you have read and are now holding?"

"That it will be your business to settle; the Fairbains never allowed the farm to be prospected, therefore the claim of Dutoit to discovery rights is illegal. If you knew this point or not before, concerns me not at all. You know it now. Their lawyer is Mr. Francis Layton; I advise you to see him and settle quickly. They would, I know, prefer not to have to go to Court, therefore it comes within your province to arrange the matter for them amicably, but for the full amount, and no compromise."

"How could I explain to my fellow directors?"

"That is your business. Better, I should say, than you can explain the presence in your cigarette case of these diamonds."

"Have you anything further to suggest?"

"Not to suggest, but to command, Mr. Vancohn, if you wish to regain your liberty."

"And that is?"

"That you resign your position as a Director, and also as the solicitor of the Luilekkerland Diamond Co. as soon as you have arranged the other matter."

"And what excuse for so doing would you suggest?"

"That I leave to you. Your health may necessitate a sojourn out of this country, but that you would decide."

"And if I consent to all this?"

"Then the incident of the diamonds and the arrest will not be mentioned; in fact, we will consider this occurrence as non-existing."

"And my property?" Vancohn glanced towards the cigarette case and the documents."

"The letter signed by Dutoit regarding the discovery rights will be handed back to you. The evidence, the diamonds, the case, and the other letter

will remain in my safe until you have fulfilled your promises."

"I have made no promise."

"No, but you will."

"And the detective?"

"Is in my employ. I give him no details of the why and wherefore; he is a discreet man; I can trust him."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will be taken to Pietsrust under arrest immediately."

Had Hillier asked for aught for himself Vancohn would have mistrusted him, but he had not done so, and on thinking quickly over the whole proposal, the astute lawyer came to the conclusion that either Hillier was an honest man, and therefore a fool, although on account of that same honesty to be trusted, or he was in league with the Fairbains, and would share the money thus obtained with them. However, either way this did not really matter to him. The chief thing so far as he was concerned was not only to avoid the annoyance and possible (if he could not fake a strong enough defence) disgrace, but also he would in any case lose his fees both as Director and Solicitor. Still, better to do so and remain on the Rolls than not to do so and be struck off.

"I agree," he said calmly.

Hillier rose from his chair, and going to the door, opened it, and called out, "Merley!" When the detective entered Hillier said:

"You can go back to your work for the present. Give me the warrant, which I will put with this letter and the cigarette case and diamonds into my safe. The other letter must remain out. You will write down a deposition of what has happened, and give same to me."

"Yes, sir," the detective replied, and left.

Mrs. Hillier, on plea of a headache, did not appear at lunch, which on the whole was an unusually silent meal, under the circumstances conversation being

strained and difficult, and shortly afterwards Mr. Vancohn left for Pietsrust.

As soon as he was well away, and some distance on the road, Mr. Hillier sent for King Snyman, and when he came into the office said to him curtly:

"There are your wages up to date and hour. I give you three hours in which to pack your traps and be off the Vuurklip property."

King Snyman had come off the machine at the bidding of two guards who had been sent for him, and as he did not happen at that moment to have any diamonds on him, he felt quite satisfied in his mind that no one could arrest him, or if they did on suspicion, he knew that he would get off scot free, the law demanding that diamonds must be actually on the person accused; he therefore had not raised any objection when told that the General Manager wanted to see him in his office. He, in fact, wondered if his friend, Mr. Vancohn, had perhaps been speaking of him in such a way that he was to be asked to do any special work or consulted about any improvement in the machinery, and so, clad as he was in his working clothes, caked with mud and bespattered with dust and dirt, he entered the office. When he saw the set, stern expression on Mr. Hillier's face, and heard his words, he was amazed, and demanded:

"What for? I want an explanation."

"You will get none."

"I'll be d——d if I will be sent off like this."

"In three hours I have said. I advise you to see about your packing."

"What for? I want proper notice or money in lieu of same."

"You will get your money up to the time you have left off work, and not a penny further."

"I will have the whole mine on strike in an hour for this business, I will."

Mr. Hillier sounded a gong.

A guard entered.

"King Snyman is leaving the mine at once. If he has not vacated his room and the property within

three hours, you will give notice to the other guards and he will be placed under arrest."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall not go. I'll be d——d if I will."

Again Mr. Hillier sounded the gong, this time twice, and his secretary appeared.

"Vincent please ring up the police and say I may require two white policemen. Will they please hold themselves in readiness. That will do."

"Yes, sir." The secretary withdrew to the outer office. The guard retired also.

"I advise you to go at once, King Snyman, and to go quietly."

"And a cart and horses?"

"You can hire. You doubtless have made money."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Come, I am tired of this nonsense. You have been told to go in less than three hours. You will find that when I tell a man to go I do not intend him to stay. If you are sensible you will leave without further parley; otherwise you and all your possessions will be liable to be handed over to the police."

"On what charge?"

"Time enough to specify when the time comes."

"I shall report this to Mr. Vancohn; he will see me righted."

Mr. Hillier smiled, and so epigrammatical was that smile, King Snyman began to suspect that all was not quite right, and concluded that he had better go while he had the chance. Perhaps the hint about searching his possessions alarmed him. Anyhow, he gathered up the wages waiting on the table for him, and muttering that he would go up at once to "Jo'burg and see the Board, every blooming one of them," he slouched out.

In less than an hour he had hired a cart and horse and was on his way to Pietsrust.

That evening, when the six o'clock whistle blew, and William Fairbain came out from his work as time-

keeper on the mine, he was told that Mr. Hillier was waiting for him at the office.

"I will walk across to your home with you, Fairbain, if you don't mind," said Mr. Hillier. "I have a message for Gloria, and though I thought of sending it by that lucky devil Martino, well, I sort of feel I would rather give it to her myself."

"Come by all means, Mr. Hillier. You know how welcome you will be," Fairbain replied. "You and your good wife have been real friends to us, that I must say."

"The other way round. In this world of swindlers it is, do you know, quite edifying to mix occasionally with the swindled. What a life! What a life!"

"I am learning to be thankful for small mercies," said Fairbain, and continued:

"It is astonishing how big troubles seem to take the sting out of little ones. Even the loss of the farm has it's compensation to some extent in the absence of my brother-in-law. He keeps out of my way in a manner that flatters me, for I think the extent of my arm muscles must be estimated as of great development."

"Well, you can take the wind out of his sails now, at any rate," said Hillier.

"What is that? How?"

"Wait till we see Gloria, and then I will tell you. It is strange how a slip of a girl like that can have the endurance of an ox and the brain of a man. Yes, Martino is a lucky chap."

"And he is getting on all right now? He didn't really like coming back to the mine."

"I know, but the men gave him a royal welcome and carried him round with cheers. It would have been a mistake not to return. When is the wedding to be?"

"Oh, that I can't say. I don't want to lose my girl. The house wouldn't be the same without her, but I suppose it will have to come some day, but, maybe, not yet. She has nothing; he only what he earns, and as for ever getting our own back or doing down

Petrus a bit, I am afraid that will fall through. No, I am trying to learn contentment, though it's only hope of buying back a bit of the land that keeps my poor wife going."

"A bit of the land? Which bit?"

And then Fairbain told Hillier about his wife's great wish to regain the piece of land where her people had been buried, and Hillier listened earnestly, and mentally decided that there was another point on which Mr. Vancohn would have to use his influence before the cigarette case now resting in his safe would be restored to its owner.

At length they reached the little house now the home of the Fairbains, and found Gloria waiting at the gate, to welcome, so she said, her father, but both he and Mr. Hillier guessed that the flush on the sweet face and the rose in the dainty white frock were waiting to welcome a younger man when he should have had time to wash off the dust from the mine and walk across, for Louis Martino had lately got into the habit of coming most nights to supper.

"Mr. Hillier has something to tell you, Gloria," said her father. "If it is a secret I will go away."

"No, it isn't a secret," said Hillier.

"It is only this. I advise you and Gloria to go to Johannesburg to-morrow to see Mr. Francis Layton, and instruct him to apply at once to the Luilekkerland Diamond Co. for a fifth undivided share in the newly-found diamond mine situated on Farm Clevedon."

"You think we have a chance?" cried Gloria.

"I don't think, I know it. Only you must not mention me. Only claim a fifth part, don't forget that, and accept no compromise."

"And it is worth what?" asked Fairbain.

"Something over fifty thousand pounds, probably nearer a hundred. You can have the car if you like."

"Oh, how kind you are," cried Gloria.

"No, I am South African, and I feel you are going to be rich, so you see I want to make up," said Hillier with a merry smile.

"You dear friend, you were kind when we were

right down. Oh, I must kiss you," and Gloria impulsively threw her arms round Mr. Hillier's neck and heartily kissed his cheek.

"I shall go straight home and tell my wife," said Hillier jokingly, for he could see how emotional Gloria was feeling at that moment.

William Fairbain, too, seemed a little overcome as the full significance of Mr. Hillier's words came to him, and he instinctively knew that he had much to thank the mine manager for. He just caught Hillier's hand in his for a moment, and said:

"I—I think I will go and speak to Aletta. My wife has suffered most of all," and he turned away and entered the house.

Then Mr. Hillier said gently to Gloria:

"Gloria, I know I can trust you not to talk. It is enough if I tell you that you were right in your belief in your sweetheart's innocence. I have settled with the real culprits, and your troubles are now, I hope, at an end. King Snyman has gone, Mr. Vancohn will use his influence to obtain the discovery rights money for your family, and, well, and Claas must have two cows for being an amateur Sherlock Holmes."

"And Oom Petrus?"

"Will get nothing more."

Then Louis Martino came hastily up, and no explanations were entered into, but Mr. Hillier shook him heartily by the hand and then left them alone, for he knew that Gloria would give to Louis no impulsive hearty kiss of friendship, but the shy embrace that is hallowed by privacy and made beautiful through love.

* * * * *

"And Oom Petrus?"

"Will get nothing more."

Those few words of conversation had been spoken with conviction, and yet lightly. How little the speakers had known the significance of what they had said.

Maybe the wind carried the words away and whispered them into the ears of a man lying so still on the mud of the drift which lay between Vuurklip and Pietsrust. A little distance off a smashed cart was showing through the stream of rushing water, and the dead body of a drowned grey horse gleamed in the moonlight, a hideous carcase so shining with water, so swollen, and yet not so loathsome an object as the corpse of the man.

Oom Petrus would get nothing more, save perhaps the Judgment of His Maker.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE little drawing-room of the New Hotel at Pietsrust was looking quite bright and pretty. Dainty fresh curtains had been hung at the two windows, and hampers of flowers from the garden of the General Manager of the Vuurklip Mine had arrived and been charmingly arranged by the nimble fingers of Mrs. Hillier. A round table, covered with the arrangements of cutlery and glass suggestive of a very special dinner, stood in the middle of the room, and on the outside of the door a ticket with the letters "PRIVATE" printed thereon was hung, so that there was no excuse for the visitors of the hotel to intrude upon the very small and select party for whom the dinner had been arranged.

Some weeks had passed since the body of Oom Petrus had been discovered in the Drift, and all legal matters had been settled, and the Luilekkerland Diamond Mining Co. had paid over to Mrs. Aletta Fairbain the sum of seventy-five thousand pounds in consideration of the discovery rights of the diamond mine on Farm Clevedon, and in addition to this had made over to her for all time, and her heirs after her, a certain corner of ground where five headstones marked the resting-places of members of the Dutoit family; this portion had been fenced off from the rest of the land, and was to remain a hallowed spot. So that once again Mrs. Fairbain felt happy, and yet her happiness was tempered still with regret; and the joy of the rest of her family at the success of their suit was sobered by the sorrow they had passed through, and the memory of that wasted life ended in the fatal drift. For if we hate those who hate us and despitely use us, still we must at the same time

regret that such lives shadowed our pathway and wrought ruin on their own. Petrus Dutoit had died without leaving a will; therefore, what was left of the money he had so unscrupulously obtained from the sale of his sister's farm reverted to her. Thus by his own death he had in a measure made recompense, yet in a way he had not dreamed of.

Wealth had come to the Fairbains, but subdued in spirit as they had been by trouble and suspense, they accepted their good fortune modestly, without display, and with the greater knowledge of life that gives with it a thankfulness and yet a not over-estimated appreciation of the gifts of life.

After talking over the position for some days, they came unanimously to the same opinion, that a change from the scene of their sorrows would be beneficial to them all, and of course Louis Martino was included in the all.

Therefore, quietly, at the Dutch Reformed Church of Pietsrust, Gloria and Louis Martino became man and wife, and the dinner arranged in the little drawing-room of the New Hotel that night was to be their farewell feast before they all proceeded together the next day to Capetown, there to embark with the intention of enjoying a six months' tour through Europe. For Gloria's honeymoon was to be shared by her father, her mother and little Johannes.

Only two guests dined with them that night, Mr. and Mrs. Hillier. Mrs. Fairbain was in black, for since her brother was dead she forgave him, and he was accorded in death the respect he had never earned in life. But the black dress was of silk, and Aletta Fairbain occasionally smoothed her skirt with an air of satisfaction. She wore also a real lace collar her husband had brought her back from Johannesburg, and the celluloid pins had disappeared from her black hair and given place to some pretty jet clasps, the present of Gloria. Little Johannes felt very important in a new suit of clothes, and had decided that, after all, it really didn't matter so much Gloria getting married, as they were not going to be separated, but

go away together on a big ship, and of course have no end of adventures; in fact, as soon as the wedding ceremony was over he had asked if he might go to the Central News Agency and buy a book about pirates. He was to sit up for late dinner too, and the Hilliers were coming, that was quite an adventure to start with.

And Gloria, how to portray her? No one can quite describe a flower, a botanist lamentably fails through prosaic detail, a painter cannot convey perfume, maybe a poet is the more able to do justice to such a subject, and yet a human flower needs something other than mere description, one's own imagination perhaps can best fulfil the mission.

Experience is like a sculptor, and remoulds a face; sorrow makes harsh lines, or else gives a matured sympathetic expression. The latter had been the case with Gloria, a little of girlhood's brightness had gone perhaps, but her face had gained in beauty nevertheless. She was clad in a simple white gown of soft material, her only ornament a string of pearls, the gift of her mother, for she had said that she would never wear diamonds, the cruel glittering stones of avarice and betrayal.

Aletta Fairbain, the generous-hearted Boer woman, had insisted that forty thousand pounds should be settled on her husband, to be used by him as he should think best, for she wished to show him her confidence in him, and to give him back some confidence in himself, and the dowry of Gloria was ten thousand pounds; thus she had not come to her lover empty handed, which had been the wish of King Snyman. This man, by the way, had disappeared from the neighbourhood of Luilekkerland, and had been heard of no more; perhaps Mr. Vancohn knew of his whereabouts, but no one else did or cared.

The flowers on the dinner table being quite to Mrs. Hillier's satisfaction, she slipped away to dress, for the Hilliers were staying the night at the hotel, and when finally all was ready, what a happy little party they were, just seven, the said-to-be perfect number beloved of the ancients and blessed by the gods.

Fulfilment so often brings with it a sense of almost fear; happiness, like beauty, verges on sadness. They were facing a new life, both Gloria and Louis and the rest of her family, and affluence did not blind their eyes to the fact that life holds sorrows for the rich as well as for the poor. They were very glad that the Hilliers were dining with them, for the chatter of Mrs. Hillier, on any subject that came into her head, saved them from lingering too much in thought or speech on the subjects that lay so near their hearts.

"I have yet to give you my wedding present," said Mr. Hillier, taking a tiny parcel from his waistcoat pocket and handing it and an envelope to Gloria.

"Another present? Oh, but this is naughty. Mrs. Hillier has already given me the sweetest little dressing-case," said Gloria, holding out her hand.

"Ah, but mine is much more unique."

"What can it be?" Gloria began to unwrap a piece of tissue paper.

"It is the famous test-stone that saved your husband," said Mr. Hillier. "I have bought it from the Company, and you will find in the envelope the necessary permit to possess it."

"I know you never intend to wear diamonds, Gloria. I have heard you say so, but you will keep it for luck, won't you, dear," said Mrs. Hillier.

"Of course I will, and I don't know how to thank you. No, after all, I won't keep it at all. I will give it to Louis, for it really belongs to him, doesn't it, by right of defence?"

"Yes, of course, only I always like to give my gifts to the lady of the family, and thus bathe in her smiles," observed Hillier.

"Don't be banal, Tom. You know you cannot pay compliments properly, so shut up. Oh, my dear Gloria, don't look shocked. I am so jealous of you for starting away on your honeymoon that I must sit on somebody, and my husband is my own legitimate cushion."

"Why can't you both come?" asked Johannes.

Mother and father and me, we are all having a honeymoon too, so why not you as well? Mr. Hillier is a big man. He would help fine if we met any pirates at sea."

"A good idea. What do you say, Aletta?" asked Mr. Fairbain.

"Ach, you seem part of the family already. You had better come if the boat is big enough. I suppose it will hold a lot. I don't know. I've never been on the sea before," said Aletta Fairbain, "and I am a bit scared at the idea."

"Oh, you will be quite comfortable, Mrs. Fairbain, and not know that you are off the land," said Mr. Hillier.

"Except that you won't have a postman twice a week," said Louis Martino.

"No, but you will get a wireless newspaper probably three times a week instead," said Mrs. Hillier. "It is dear of you all to want us, but we cannot manage it."

"And that reminds me," said Mr. Fairbain. "I want to say something, and I do not know quite how. You see, my wife and I quite realise that we have to thank both you, Mr. Hillier, and your wife for all you have done for us, and since naked thanks clothe no one, we—we want you to accept a little present of three thousand pounds, just as a small token of our affection. We can easily spare it, so don't shake your head, Hillier, and if ever you want more, come and ask."

"You are very good. I appreciate your thought. Yes, I do, really, but I couldn't accept, for two reasons, one that I have been happy in helping you, and success has been thanks enough; the other reason is that I am employed by the Luilekkerland Diamond Co., and since the money you have received was payment from them, I do not see my way clear to accept any portion of it. You see my point, don't you, and will understand how gratefully I appreciate your thought and generosity."

"Ach, you may be engaged by those Luilekkerland people, but your wife isn't, and she may be having a

birthday a year hence if she isn't to-day," observed Mrs. Fairbain.

Before Mr. Hillier could respond, his wife said gaily :

"Oh, Mrs. Fairbain, you are just the kindest soul I ever met, and if it wasn't for the thought of crushing your new gown I would hug you this minute. But, my dear, I don't mean to have any more birthdays. I dare not. I am getting so old. I cream my face at night, and I simply won't look in a glass in the morning. I manage my hair without. People are beginning to tell me I look young, that is when they want anything, so by that I know they also realise that I am in the fading forties, and are willing to help me to deceive myself. Thank God, Tom is getting grey and bald, so when I feel sad about my anniversaries I look at him. If only he would grow fat also, I should feel quite settled, resigned and comforted. No, my dears, you are all so generous; if ever things go utterly wrong and there is nothing before us but old-age pension, I will remind you of your kind offer. But now that you have really conquered the fickle fortune of South Africa, do, do, I earnestly beg of you, be careful. In this world one loses so much more easily than one can gain. Above all, keep away from Johannesburg and be deaf to all speculative advice."

Mrs. Hillier's voice had grown more serious with her concluding words, and Louis Martino said smilingly :

"Oh, Mrs. Hillier, don't throw cold water on my aspirations. I was just planning to become a Percy of Pritchard Street, and wondered if Gloria would admire me with a waxed moustache, and if I should be eligible for the Rand Club."

"The Rand Club? Oh, but I must tell you the very latest story about that exclusive edifice," cried Mrs. Hillier, a twinkle coming back into her eyes and a smile to her lips. "It is a vulgar story perhaps, but has the merit of being true, and therefore may pass for being witty. The husband of a friend of mine was put up for this Club about a month ago, and I

may tell you that he is a very nice man. He, however, had the misfortune to have certain scruples which did not tend to promote the fortunes of a Jewish acquaintance of his, a member of this Club, and so Mr. Judia had my friend black-balled. In due course, my friend received a polite letter from the secretary saying that he, the secretary, regretted to inform him that he had not been elected a member. Now, I think the reply of my friend was quite delicious. He wrote to the secretary and said, *he also regretted not having been elected a member, as he had heard that the outside accommodation of the Club was quite the best in town.*"

Mr. Fairbain and Louis Martino laughed heartily; Mrs. Fairbain did not see the point; Gloria blushed.

"Really, Alice, you are the limit; you must not tell such stories," said her husband, pretending to speak severely.

"I know, my dear, but I feel cheery to-night, and when I am I just enjoy to remember the quips and quibbles of that golden city of the godless. Gloria, my dear, you, as a farmer's daughter, will know that calves are rarely killed in this country, and pork is often substituted for veal. Still, if there is little veal in South Africa, there's lots of worshipping of the golden calf. You will all be so popular in this country if you return with any of your coin left; that is why I say in Heaven's name be careful and lock up in sound securities that which you possess. Fortunately, you are rich in love for each other, and that will, I hope, save you from becoming victims to the flatteries of others."

"When we come back, we return to the veld, eh, Aletta? No towns for us."

"Ach, William, the veld is clean," replied his wife.

"And Martino?" asked Mr. Hillier.

"Oh, we shall farm next door to mother; then I can be a real Boer and borrow all her farm implements," laughed Gloria.

"And I shall live three days on each farm and toss up about Sundays," Johannes remarked with decision.

"Ach, Sundays, indeed? We shall all be together on Sundays, please God," said his mother.

* * * * *

When dinner was over, Gloria and her husband stole away from the hotel and went for a little walk by the river. It was a fine moonlight night, and yet they did not think of the moonlight as hand in hand they strolled together. No, they remembered the sunshine of that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday, when they had loitered by the river on Farm Clevedon, and had given each other their first kiss.

There were many tall poplar trees growing near the river, along a pathway known as "the lovers' walk," and graceful willows bent their boughs and foliage down to the water's edge. The chirp of the crickets in the grass, the hum of the beetles in the bushes, and and croaking of many frogs made up a familiar chorus; it all sounded like music to the ears of the newly-wedded pair, for all nature seemed to glean from their happiness echoes of the songs singing in their hearts.

"Gloria, my wife!" said Louis reverently, holding her gently in his arms and looking into the sweetness of her face. "Isn't it wonderful to call you that!"

"Yes, Louis, but life is altogether wonderful, and, of course, it must be so, since God made it."

THE END

